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The Importance of Clothing in 1960s Protest Movements

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THE IMPORTANCE OF CLOTHING IN 1960S PROTEST MOVEMENTS

A Capstone Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree Bachelor of Arts
with Honors College Graduate Distinction at
Western Kentucky University

By

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April 12, 2019

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I dedicate this thesis to my grandpa, Bobby Beighle, who I miss and love with all my heart, and to my best friend, Alexis Shipwash, who has always been by my side.

This one's for you, queen.

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This research project could not have been made possible without the support of my loving parents, Kimberly and James Ziege, my older brother, Zachary Ziege, and the rest of my family and friends, who all gave me endless support during my collegiate career at Western Kentucky University.

I also want to recognize the professors of the Fleischaker-Greene Scholars Program, Dr. Rich Shumate and Dr. David Lee, who taught the class I took part in during the fall semester in 2018 and were the main supervisors of this project during that semester. It was in this class that I decided to complete my Honors Capstone thesis project. While taking part in the Fleischaker-Greene Scholars Program, the theme of our class during that semester was “protest,” and I decided to focus my project further on the particular clothes worn in specific protest movements because many protest movements have been identified throughout history by the clothes worn by protesters in those movements. Further narrowing my project, I decided to focus on the clothing and accessories worn in protest movements during the 1960s because much of our class centered on that decade of American history. Without the help of Dr. Shumate and Dr. Lee, I would not have been able to interview Alan Canfora, a survivor of the Kent State University shooting in 1970, and Mary Beth Tinker, one of the defendants of the famous Supreme Court case, *Tinker v. Des Moines*.

To that end, I also want to thank Alan Canfora and Mary Beth Tinker, who are two incredible civil rights activists that I was blessed to have met and interviewed. I appreciate them taking the time to speak to our class and allowing us to learn more about their stories.

I want to give thanks to the academic staffs in the journalism and history departments at WKU. As I am a journalism major and history minor, I have met and worked with many brilliant professionals from these departments, and I would not be where I am today without their support.

Lastly, I want to thank WKU because I am truly blessed to have met and worked with so many fantastic people during these past four years. This institution will always hold a special place in my heart, and I will always be proud to be a Hilltopper.

ABSTRACT

The 1960s became one of the most tumultuous decades in American history because the decade experienced ideological polarization between the younger and older generations, and there was a mass influx of protests by many from the country's younger generation in support of political and social changes for the country. Protest movements, including the anti-Vietnam War movement, the women's liberation movement and the Civil Rights movement, became significant to the political and ideological landscape of the 1960s. Clothing became a central visual tactic to create cohesion between the protesters of these movements in order to make their protests more effective and create symbolic forms of expression and rebellion against the traditions, standards and rules of society, thus creating some of the most memorable protest movements in the 20th century in the United States.

This paper examines these three protest movements and how they each used clothing in unique ways, including black armbands and bell-bottoms for the Vietnam War protest movement, bras and other pieces of clothing for the women's liberation movement, and the uniforms of the Black Panther Party for the civil rights movement. They each utilized these underrated forms of expression in order to rebel against societal standards and the expectations of previous generations, make statements about their views on society, call attention to specific issues by which they and their communities are impacted, and develop community among one another. During this decade, these separate protest movements, which developed from societal griefs and desires for equality, defied the traditional standards of American life and ideologically divided the younger and older generations.

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INTRODUCTION

The 1960s became one of the most tumultuous decades in American history because while experiencing ideological polarization between the younger and older generations, there was a mass influx of protests by many from the country's younger generation in support of political and social changes for the country. In an interview with Tony Harkins, a history professor at Western Kentucky University who has studied 20th century American history and American popular culture since the Civil War, he said that during the 1960s, the United States began to shift politically and ideologically due to the anti-Vietnam War movement, which sparked from the country's continued involvement in Vietnam, because it was a protest movement that called for a desire to change the country from the younger American generation. Additionally, Harkins said that the landscape shifted at the start of the decade due to the Civil Rights movement, the movement that called for equal rights for African-American people in America. "It changed the political and ideological landscape and opened the path for nearly all other movements, either directly or indirectly," Harkins said in an interview¹.

Regarding the indirect effect that the Civil Rights movement had on the American ideological landscape, one significant protest movement that indirectly emerged from the Civil Rights movement was the women's liberation movement. According to Julie E. Clements's article, "Participatory Democracy: The Bridge from Civil Rights to Women's Liberation," many female protesters in the women's liberation movement were fueled to protest for their own rights after the momentum of the Civil Rights movement in the early 1960s². Altogether, the three protest movements became intertwined, as many protesters for one of the movements often

¹ Harkins, Tony (WKU History Professor). "Interview with" Nicole Ziege. Interview March/27/2019.

² Clements, Julie E. "Participatory Democracy: The Bridge from Civil Rights to Women's Liberation," *Department of Public Administration, Public Policy*. Accessed April 11, 2019, Web.

supported others and all three called for political and ideological changes in the country, which included calling for a stop to the Vietnam War, the disenfranchisement of African-Americans, and the sexual objectification of women.

As these three protest movements became significant to the political and ideological landscape of the 1960s, clothing became a central visual tactic to create cohesion between the protesters of these movements in order to make their protests more effective and create symbolic forms of expression and rebellion against the traditions, standards and rules of society, thus creating some of the most memorable protest movements in the 20th century in the United States. During this decade, these separate protest movements, which developed from societal griefs and desires for equality, defied the traditional standards of American life and ideologically divided the younger and older generations, creating one of the most tumultuous decades in American history.

Specifically, this essay will examine a few items of clothing and style worn by members of the anti-Vietnam War “counterculture” movement, the removal of clothing by supporters of the women’s liberation movement during the 1968 Miss America protest, and the uniforms worn by the Black Panther Party for Self Defense as a form of protest during the civil rights movement. Supporters of the anti-Vietnam War movement used black armbands, long hair, and bell-bottoms as a symbolic way to express their disapproval for the war and the draft, to defy the expectations of the previous generations, particularly regarding the expressions for men during the 1960s, and to create community among one another in their movement. Supporters of the Women’s Liberation Movement who protested against the Miss America pageant in 1968 used the removal of clothing pieces like bras and high heels as a symbolic form of protest against the swimsuit portion of the Miss America pageant and to protest the objectification of women in

society. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense used militaristic uniforms consisting of black berets, black leather jackets and assault rifles to regain their authority in their predominantly African-American communities, to protest the brutality and exploitation of African-Americans in the United States, and to call attention to the injustices that they felt African-American men, particularly, were facing during the 1960s.

SECTION TWO: THE ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT

Since the 1960s, the anti-Vietnam War protest movement has gained recognition as one of the most significant examples of a counterculture movement that became famous through the use of the clothing and appearances of the protesters. Some of the most famous examples of anti-war counterculture protest clothing included black armbands, as seen in the Supreme Court case *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, long hair, particularly on men, and bell-bottom pants.

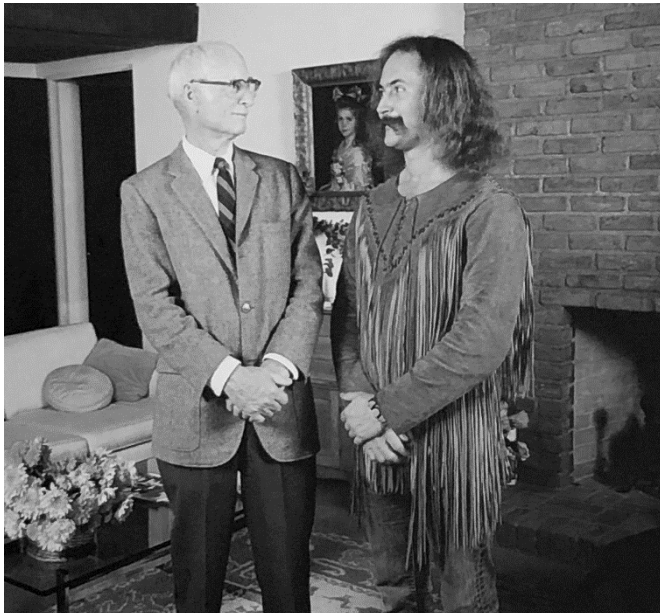


Figure 1. Singer-songwriter David Crosby (right) stands with his father, Floyd. Beneath hair and clothing, deeper political and social views divide many fathers and sons in the 1960s. (Photo taken at Kent State University).

The decade of the 1960s became heavily influenced by the United States' increased involvement in the Vietnam War. According to induction statistics from the Selective Service System, between August 1964 and February 1973, more than 1.8 million men served in the conflict; while two-thirds of the men who served were volunteers, the rest were young men who were drafted between the ages of 18 and 25 years old³. Before the

United States Congress reformed the draft in 1971⁴, men could qualify for and request a deferment from the draft if they could prove that they were full-time students, if they were needed at home to support their families, if they were married or had children, or if they had

³ "Induction Statistics," *Selective Service System*, Accessed Dec 1, 2018, Web.

⁴ "How the Draft Has Changed Since Vietnam," *Selective Service System*, Accessed Feb. 22, 2019, Web.

physical or mental problems. According to *Business Insider*, more than half of the 27 million American men eligible to be drafted during the Vietnam era were deferred, exempted, or disqualified, and many of those deferred from the draft came from wealthy and educated families, including U.S. President Donald Trump, former U.S. vice president Joe Biden, and former U.S. vice president Dick Cheney⁵.

The Vietnam War's continuation and escalation, as well as the use of the draft through the Selective Service System, developed into opposition against the war by many young adults and students, and this opposition became known as the anti-Vietnam War movement, which was part of an alternative culture in society, or the 1960s "counterculture." Members of the anti-war movement joined because they disagreed with the draft and with the war on moral and economic grounds. This movement primarily gained traction among youth in America because the Vietnam War had a significant impact on young adults, and there are many news articles from *The New York Times*, among several other newspapers, where that impact can be seen, including an article from August 10, 1966, titled "Nation's Youth feel Major U.S. Impact of War in Vietnam."

In this article, the significance of the Vietnam War on the younger generation was brought to readers' attention, and readers were able to see how young people were being affected in their daily lives and in their societal and political views with the escalation of the Vietnam War. One excerpt from the article read, "...the Vietnam conflict has nevertheless generated an intellectual, moral and ideological upheaval passionately centered among American young people."⁶

⁵ Alfaro, Mariana, "Donald Trump avoided the military draft 5 times, but it wasn't uncommon for young men from influential families to do so during the Vietnam War," *Business Insider*, Dec. 26, 2018, Web.

⁶Loftus, Joseph A., "Nation's Youth feel Major U.S. Impact of War in Vietnam," *The New York Times (1923-Current file)*: 1. Aug 10, 1966. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times. Accessed Dec. 1, 2018.

As members of the youth were affected by the war, they started wearing certain articles of clothing as an unspoken form of protest against the violence that was affecting their country, including black armbands, which were worn by Mary Beth Tinker and two other defendants in the Supreme Court case *Tinker v. Des Moines* (See Figure 2).

Des Moines, Iowa, native Mary Beth Tinker was 13 years old and had just entered the eighth grade when the United States officially went to war with Vietnam in 1965⁷. In an interview with Tinker, she said that although her views about society were largely shaped by the civil rights movement taking place in the South during the 1960s, she and



Figure 2. Des Moines, Iowa, students Mary Beth Tinker and her brother, John Tinker, display two black armbands, the objects of the U.S. Supreme Court’s agreement on March 4, 1968. (Photo by Otto Bettmann, Getty Images).

many young kids her age were especially saddened by the Vietnam War. According to the National Archives’ Vietnam War U.S. Military Fatal Casualty Statistics, in 1965, about 170,000 U.S. soldiers were stationed in Vietnam, and about 1,900 soldiers were killed during their service⁸. Graphic footage of the conflict could be seen every day by Americans of all ages as they watched the news on their television sets. During the interview, Tinker described the negative sentiments of the children in her school: “Us kids were just getting sadder and sadder.

⁷Although there had been limited U.S. naval action in Vietnam prior to this year, the United States officially sent the first American combat troops, the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, to the shores of China Beach north of Da Nang on March 8, 1965, introducing the first fighting troops. De La Cruz, Ralph, “Few will remember U.S. entered Vietnam War 48 years ago today,” *Dallas News*, March 2013, Accessed Feb. 17, 2019, Web.

⁸ “Vietnam War U.S. Military Fatal Casualty Statistics,” *National Archives*, Accessed Dec. 1, 2018, Web.

Kids generally don't like war. The adults always told us in school to use our words. Why don't they use their words?"⁹

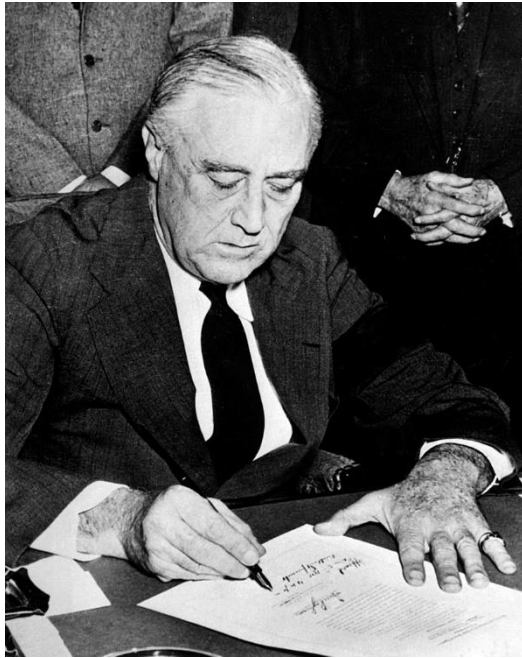


Figure 3. Former U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt wears a black armband while signing the declaration of war against Japan after the attack on Pearl Harbor. December 8, 1941. (Photo by Abbie Rowe, Records of the National Park Service).

The wearing of black armbands was suggested to Tinker and her siblings while she attended an Iowans for Peace anti-war rally in November 1965 because the armbands represented mourning for the dead in both the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. Although *Tinker v. Des Moines* became the most famous example of wearing black armbands to symbolize mourning, in Western culture, black armbands have signified the mourning of a family friend, comrade or team member, and they can also be used to identify with the mourning of another person¹⁰. Another example of black armbands being worn in American history before *Tinker v. Des Moines*

includes former U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt wearing a black armband after the Attack on Pearl Harbor while signing the declaration of war against Japan on December 8, 1941 (See Figure 3).

On Dec. 14, 1965, Tinker and her family discovered the news that all students in the Des Moines Independent Community School District were prohibited from wearing black armbands. Referring to the school's ban on the black armbands, Tinker said: "The school didn't really have

⁹ Tinker, Mary Beth, (First Amendment rights activist), "Interview with" Nicole Ziege and the Fleischaker-Greene Scholars Class, Interview November/15/2018.

¹⁰ McKenna, Mark, "Different Perspectives on Black Armband History," *Politics and Public Administration Group, Parliament of Australia: Research Publications*, Nov. 10, 1997, Accessed Feb. 20, 2019, Web.

an issue with students expressing themselves. They just wanted it to be about something that they agreed with.¹¹”

Tinker and her brother, John Tinker, still decided to wear their black armbands into school, along with three other students, and they were all suspended and sent home until they could return to school without the black armbands. Although the students returned to school after the Christmas break without the armbands, they decided to wear black clothing for the rest of the school year in protest¹². Three of the five students moved forward with a legal case against the Des Moines Independent Community School District, including Tinker, her brother, and Chris Eckhardt, arguing that the use of the black armbands constituted their freedom of speech and expression under the First Amendment, as they used the armbands to protest the U.S. government’s policy in Vietnam¹³. It took four years for the students’ legal case to move all the way to the Supreme Court of the United States, and on Feb. 24, 1969, the Court ruled 7-2 that students do not “shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.¹⁴”

The black armbands became a symbolic embodiment of Tinker’s protesting against the Vietnam War, as well as the civil rights movement, although the civil rights movement protest was not specifically stated in the court documents for the *Tinker v. Des Moines*. By using the armbands as protest clothing, students like Tinker were able to express their grief about the deaths from the war and from the civil rights movement and express their anger about the

¹¹ Tinker, Mary Beth, (First Amendment rights activist), “Interview with” Nicole Ziege and the Fleischaker-Greene Scholars Class, Interview November/15/2018.

¹² “Tinker v. Des Moines – Landmark Supreme Court Ruling on Behalf of Student Expression,” *American Civil Liberties Union*, Accessed Nov. 31, 2018, Web.

¹³ “Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, 393 U.S. 503 (1969),” *Justia: Justia Opinion Summary and Annotations*, Accessed Feb. 10, 2019, Web.

¹⁴ “Tinker v. Des Moines – Landmark Supreme Court Ruling on Behalf of Student Expression,” *American Civil Liberties Union*, Accessed Nov. 31, 2018, Web.

continuation of the Vietnam War, which was a common emotion shared by members of the anti-war counterculture movement.

The use of black armbands in *Tinker v. Des Moines* was a more isolated example of a piece of clothing used by the anti-war movement to protest the war. More broadly-used clothing examples made the anti-war movement and the 1960s counterculture more



Figure 4. Former Haight-Asbury community leader Tsvi Strauch and then-wife Hyla Deer-Strauch enjoying the vibe in 1967 San Francisco (Photo from The Jewish News of Southern California).

identifiable throughout American history, including bell-bottoms and long hair. While not everyone who wore long hair and bell-bottoms were supporters of the anti-war movement, those pieces of clothing and staples of appearance were often used by many in the movement, as well as by the youth in the 1960s who were part of the counterculture in that decade.

Long hair contributed to the appearance of anti-war protesters because it was a look that symbolically rejected gender expectations for men during the 1960s and opposed the structure of the military. Upon first glance, this apparel might have seemed trivial to people outside of the movement, but for the counterculture's supporters and for many young people in the 1960s, they helped to spread the protest messages of the anti-war movement and defy against the gender and societal expectations of men from previous generations.

For these men, this simple, yet articulate, form of expression and rebellion allowed them to show their defiance for the draft and the war because if a young man joined or was drafted

into the military, he would have needed to cut and shave his hair off. Additionally, the use of appearing unkempt, unshaven, and ragged was utilized to directly oppose the clean, shaven, presentable, and structured appearance of the men in the military.

In my interview with Dr. Tony Harkins, he said that the long hair of anti-war supporters was a symbolic rejection of the Vietnam War because of what the war represented:

“I think the war is seen as an extension of mainstream society and its emphasis on conformity, control, middle-class stability and also white European standards,” Harkins said. “I think it’s a rejection of all of that.¹⁵”

Therefore, because the war represented conformity and control, it can be proven that men who chose to wear their hair longer than the socially-acceptable length were wanting to oppose those ideals by taking back control for themselves and letting their hair grow out, as well as growing their hair longer in order to oppose the conformity of society’s expectations of masculinity and femininity.

The symbolism of men wearing long hair in the anti-war movement, as well as the controversy that came from wearing longer hair in mainstream America, became the primary focuses of *Hair*, a musical that released on April 29, 1968, and faced backlash from many conservatives in the country due to its sexual politics, nudity, use of drugs, and its treatment of the American flag¹⁶. The show, which was written by Gerome Ragni and James Rado, focused on the character Claude as he was about to be drafted and followed his story as he joined a group of hippies and contemplated his place in society. Because of its controversy, the show sparked several protests during its tour, including in Evansville, Indiana, Gladewater, Texas, St. Paul,

¹⁵ Harkins, Tony (WKU History Professor). “Interview with” Nicole Ziege. Interview March/27/2019.

¹⁶ Libbey, Peter, “When ‘Hair’ Opened on Broadway, It Courted Controversy from the Start,” *The New York Times*, Apr. 29, 2018, Web.

Minnesota, and in Tennessee¹⁷. However, it was that controversy around protesting the Vietnam War and the show's bringing the anti-war counterculture movement into the faces of mainstream America that allowed it to build a worldwide audience of 30 million within four years of production and allowed it to make its mark on the social, cultural and political dialogue in the 1960s and 1970s¹⁸. The show developed the ideas that long hair was a symbolic expression of nonconformity in the counterculture movement, as well as it showing how hair was a tool used to protest the Vietnam War.

Harkins expressed the significance of the musical *Hair*: “*Hair* was an acknowledgement of the counterculture movement,” Harkins said. “I think it was a challenge to the long-standing standards of gender and middle-class-ness in mainstream society.”¹⁹”

WKU's theater department performed its production of *Hair* in early November 2018, and in an interview with WKU senior Nick Struck, the show's dramaturg, he emphasized the importance of hair in the show, as well as in the 1960s: “Long hair was a form of liberation and freedom, while short hair sort of represented conformity.”²⁰”

¹⁷ Libbey, Peter, “When ‘Hair’ Opened on Broadway, It Courted Controversy from the Start,” *The New York Times*, Apr. 29, 2018, Accessed Dec. 1, 2018, Web.

¹⁸ Moore, John, “The dangerous history of ‘Hair,’” *The Denver Post*, Sept. 29, 2011, Accessed Dec. 1, 2018, Web.

¹⁹ Harkins, Tony (WKU History Professor). “Interview with” Nicole Ziege. Interview March/27/2019.

²⁰ Struck, Nick. (WKU senior, show dramaturg). “Interview with” Nicole Ziege.

In an interview with Jada Morris, the costume designer for WKU Theater’s production of *Hair*, she said the title song in the show highlighted the significance of the apparel in the show:

“Hair was a protesting source, growing it long and sort of saying, ‘You’re not going to get me.

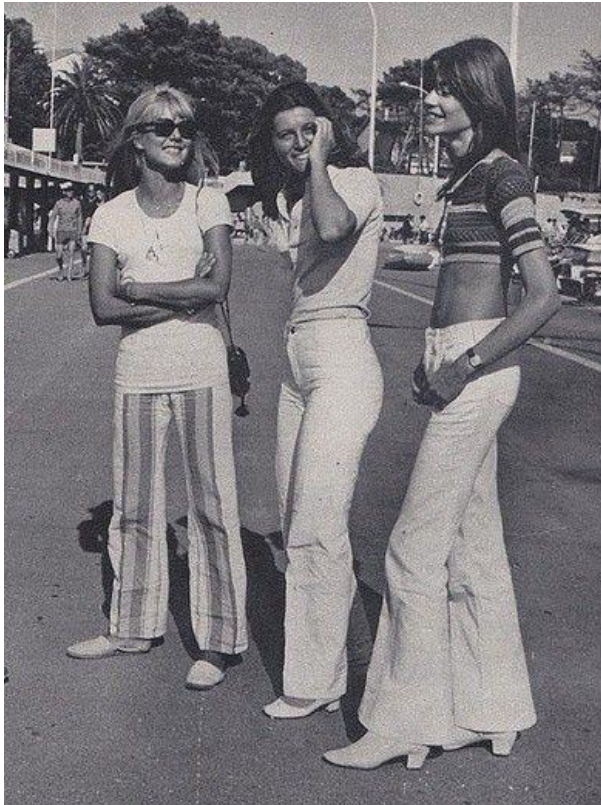


Figure 5. Young women wearing bell-bottoms during the 1960s. (Unknown Photographer).

You’re not going to cut it off.²¹”

Along with wearing longer hair, supporters of the anti-war counterculture movement in the 1960s started wearing bell-bottoms, which were a new type of pants that came into the mainstream as a subtle way to protest against society in the 1960s. “Bell-bottoms” consisted of pants with legs that were wider below the knee, and they were a revolutionary way to wear pants in the 1960s, which became a bold fashion statement for members of the counterculture and anti-war movement in the 1960s, including men and

women (See Figure 5). The flare at the bottom of the legs in the bell bottoms often ranged from one inch wide to 3 inches wide, depending on the preference of the buyer, as seen in an advertisement from the New York Times²² (See Figure 6).

²¹ Morris, Jada. (WKU costume designer). “Interview with” Nicole Ziege. Interview November/29/2018. <https://youtu.be/n9a9quDoctI>.

²² “Flare-up in casual slacks,” *The New York Times (1923-Current file)*, Apr. 20, 1969, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times, SMA118. Accessed Feb. 10, 2018. Web.

Bell-bottoms became a way for young men, in particular, to rebel against the gender expectations of society in the 1960s because pant legs had always been styled close to the leg down to the shoes. Bell-bottoms defied these traditional designs and were more inexpensive than regular pants for men. *The New York Times* advertisement for men's bell-bottoms featured in Figure 6 includes bell-bottoms for prices ranging from \$14-\$45, but these prices were much more expensive than those purchased at average secondhand stores and military surplus stores due to them being sold in New York department stores. However, because bell-bottoms were found in department store advertisements, it can be proven that this counterculture trend entered the mainstream 1960s fashion culture.

The affordability and accessibility of young people to purchase bell-bottoms at military surplus stores and secondhand stores allowed them to rebel against society by allowing them to reject the more expensive department stores at which their parents had shopped, thus defying



Figure 6. A department store advertisement for men's bell-bottoms, published in *The New York Times* on April 20, 1969. Because bell-bottoms were sold at department stores, as well as secondhand stores, it can be proven that the counterculture's trend of wearing bell-bottoms entered the mainstream fashion culture during the 1960s. (*The New York Times*)

against the previous generations. Additionally, by purchasing the bell-bottoms at military surplus stores, members of the anti-war movement took a piece of clothing that had been formerly used in the military and repurposed it for their protest movement as another way to reject the military and the war.

Bell-bottoms allowed men to rebel against the restrictive clothing of the previous generation because in addition to the flared pant legs, bell-bottoms provided a more casual form of bottoms for men and were often sewn from denim, bright cotton and satin polyester²³. As they came into style for the anti-war counterculture movement, young people started customizing their bell-bottoms to personalize them for the movement, often by sewing pieces of old military uniforms onto their bell-bottoms in order to add a specific rebellious look to their counterculture clothing²⁴. Bell-bottoms became a staple of clothing in the anti-war movement because they represented the defiance of the younger generation to conform to the strict, conservative clothing of the 1950s, and the defiance against the previous generations, as well as also protesting the military and the war²⁵.

However, besides rebelling against the previous generations, those who were part of the anti-war counterculture also formed a communal connection with one another when they identified with the use of bell-bottoms and long hair. Although not everyone who wore bell-bottoms and long hair during the 1960s was part of the anti-war counterculture movement, those who were part of the movement could be more identified by the use of the appearance that bell-bottoms and long hair created in society, and they were able to connect more with one another because they were members of the same protest movement.

²³ “Bell-bottoms.” *The Encyclopedia of Fashion*. Accessed Dec 3, 2018. Web.

²⁴ “Bell-bottoms.” *The Encyclopedia of Fashion*. Accessed Dec 3, 2018. Web.

²⁵ “Bell-bottoms.” *The Encyclopedia of Fashion*. Accessed Dec 3, 2018. Web.



Figure 7. Kent State University student Alan Canfora waves a black flag as Ohio Army National Guardsmen kneel and aim their rifles on a football field, Kent, Ohio, May 4, 1970. (Photo by John Filo, Getty Images)

This can be proven from an interview with Alan Canfora, 69, who was a member of the counterculture anti-war movement during the 1960s and 1970s. Canfora was one of the nine college students wounded by the Ohio National Guard during a

peaceful anti-war demonstration on May 4, 1970. During an interview that our Fleischaker-Greene class conducted with Canfora while visiting Kent State University, Canfora emphasized how bell-bottoms and the clothing worn by the counterculture helped to create community among them, in addition to protesting the war.

“It was a statement of your individuality and your stance on society,” Canfora said. “The people who wore bell bottoms and had the long hair, you knew they were part of the anti-war people. You felt a form of kinship with them.”²⁶”

By wearing long hair and bell-bottoms, members of the 1960s-counterculture anti-war movement helped showcase their disapproval for the Vietnam War and the draft, as well as create community among their movement. Their protest clothing helped them promote their cause and connect with other anti-war protesters around them, which spoke to the significance of clothing in protest movements.

²⁶ Canfora, Alan. (Kent State shooting survivor). “Interview with” Nicole Ziege and the Fleischaker-Greene Scholars class. Interview November/2/2018.

SECTION THREE: THE MISS AMERICA PROTEST OF 1968

The anti-Vietnam War counterculture was not the only protest movement during the 1960s that used clothing and accessories to make statements about society and to protest against societal and gender expectations. The women's rights movement, referred to as the "women's liberation movement" during the 1960s and 1970s, utilized the symbolic expression of removing seemingly-simple pieces of clothing that were feminine, including bras and high heels, in order to protest the Miss America pageant in 1968 and to protest the overall objectification of women in American society.

As the women's liberation movement progressed during the 1960s, popular novels released during the 1960s allowed women to start discussing societal inequality and systemic sexism, which Betty Friedan referred to in her 1963 novel *The Feminine Mystique* as "the problem that has no name." This systemic sexism, highlighted by Friedan and later by women's liberation activists, taught women, particularly middle-class suburban housewives, to remain at home and to not reach their full intellectual and creative faculties²⁷. In the 1960s, the country saw women push more for social equality and push against wage, education and employment inequality, and this movement progressed from the mid-1960s to its decline in momentum in the 1980s²⁸. While there were legal victories for the women's rights movement in the 1960s for ending sexual discrimination, including the passage of Title VII in the 1964 Civil Rights Act²⁹ that prohibited discrimination based on sex, as well as race, religion and national origin, women

²⁷ Grady, Constance, "The waves of feminism, and why people keep fighting over them, explained," *Vox*, July 20, 2018, Accessed Nov. 20, 2018, Web.

²⁸ Gordon, Linda, "Socialist Feminism: The Legacy of the 'Second Wave,'" *CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies: A Journal of Ideas, Analysis and Debate - New Labor Forum*, Sept. 2013, Accessed Feb. 25, 2019, Web.

²⁹ Eisenberg, Bonnie, and Ruthsdotter, Mary. "History of the Women's Rights Movement: Living the Legacy: The Women's Rights Movement (1848-1998)." *National Women's History Alliance*, 1998. Accessed Dec 3, 2018. Web.

in the women's liberation movement were still particularly upset about the objectification of women in American society.

This idea of objectification in society comes from the sexual objectification theory, which states that many women are sexually objectified and treated as an object to be valued for its use by others. Sexual objectification occurs when a woman's body or body parts are singled out and separated from her as a person, and the woman is viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire³⁰. The existing frustrations that women's liberation activists held against the

objectification of women in American society led about 100 women's rights protesters to the headquarters of the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on September 7, 1968, where they protested the



Figure 8. On the Atlantic City Boardwalk, demonstrators, some waving high heels or underwear, protest the Miss America beauty pageant, Atlantic City, New Jersey, September 7, 1968. (Photo by Bev Grant, Getty Images)

³⁰ Szymanski, Dawn M., Moffitt, Lauren B., & Carr, Erika R. "Sexual Objectification of Women: Advances to Theory and Research," *The Counseling Psychologist*, 39 (1): 6-38, DOI: 10.1177/0011000010378402. Accessed Feb. 24, 2019. Web.

continuation of the swimsuit portion of the pageant.

The Miss America pageant originated in 1921 as the “Inter-City Beauty” contest in Atlantic City, New Jersey, and gathered a wider audience in the 1950s as the pageant telecast allowed more people to view it on their television sets, breaking viewing records with about 27 million Americans watching the event³¹. The swimsuit portion of the pageant, which has been the most controversial element, was introduced at the start of the pageant’s infancy in 1921, and it became the focus on the women’s protesting.

The protest was organized by the New York Radical Women group and consisted of women in their 20s and 30s, as well as mothers and grandmothers, who traveled to Atlantic City



Figure 9. Protesters discarded bras and other items of "oppression." (Alix Kates Shulman Papers/Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University)

from states across the nation, including Washington, Florida, New York and Iowa. The protesters held signs that said, “Up against the wall, Miss America,” “Welcome to the Miss America Cattle Auction,” and “If you want meat, go to the butcher.”³²

However, the most memorable element of the 1968 Miss America protest was the use of clothing and accessories as symbolic

³¹ “Miss America: A History,” *Miss America*, Accessed Dec. 1, 2018, Web.

³² Heller, Karen, “The bra-burning feminist trope started at Miss America. Except, that’s not what really happened,” *The Washington Post*, Sept. 7, 2018, Accessed Nov. 27, 2018, Web.

representations of the women's protest of societal standards for women. The women used beauty items and clothing, including high heels, bras, underwear, and lipstick, in order to symbolize their disapproval with society and the social expectations for women held in the country.

As they protested upon the boardwalk, the protesters ripped off their bras, girdles and high heels and threw them into the "Freedom Trash Can" (See Figure 9), along with their "girlie" magazines, makeup and anything else that they deemed "instruments of female torture."³³ The "Freedom Trash Can" was a large bucket brought with the protesters, and it symbolized that the removal of their feminine garments would allow them to live more freely in society. According to the article of the protest from *The New York Times*, the women protested behind police barriers, and like other protests throughout history, they faced counter-protesters and unsympathetic spectators, including one man who shouted at them as they threw their belongings into the symbolic trash can, "Why don't you throw yourselves in there? It would be a lot more useful."³⁴

One misconception around the 1968 Miss America protests was that the protesters burned their bras during the protest, but they actually did not, as they were instructed by the mayor of Atlantic City, Richard S. Jackson, not to do so. According to the Smithsonian Magazine, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the protest, the myth can be traced back to the New York Post reporter Lindsay Van Gelder, who, in a piece before the protest, suggested protesters would burn bras, which was a nod to the burning of draft cards³⁵. According to an interview with one of the protesters during the protest, as reported by *The New York Times* in 1968, the protesters did

³³ Heller, Karen, "The bra-burning feminist trope started at Miss America. Except, that's not what really happened," *The Washington Post*, Sept. 7, 2018, Accessed Nov. 27, 2018, Web.

³⁴ Curtis, Charlotte, "Miss America Pageant is picketed by 100 Women," *The New York Times (1923-Current file)*, 81. Sept. 8, 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, Accessed Feb. 20, 2019, Web.

³⁵ Gay, Roxane, "Fifty Years Ago, Protesters Took on the Miss America Pageant and Electrified the Feminist Movement," *Smithsonian Magazine* (January 2018), Web.

not want to incite or provoke the spectators and did not want to cause violence and damage to Atlantic City property³⁶. They merely wanted to make their voices heard and make a statement about their disapproval of society's rigorous standards for women.

Through the use of their protest signs and their acts of throwing their clothing away in the Freedom Trash Can, the protesters deplored "the degrading mindless-boob-girlie symbol" and insisted that "the only 'free' woman is 'the woman who is no longer enslaved by ludicrous beauty standards."³⁷" Although the Miss America pageant did not stop its swimsuit portion following the protests, the pageant merely symbolized how the women's rights movement wanted to protest the overall objectification of women in American society, and without the use of clothing in the 1968 Miss America protest, the protesters would not have made the significance sent a message of protesting the objectification of women in society and would not have been able to make the protest as memorable as it became.

³⁶ Curtis, Charlotte, "Miss America Pageant is picketed by 100 Women," *The New York Times (1923-Current file)*, 81. Sept. 8, 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, Accessed Feb. 20, 2019, Web.

³⁷ Curtis, Charlotte, "Miss America Pageant is picketed by 100 Women," *The New York Times (1923-Current file)*, 81. Sept. 8, 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, Accessed Feb. 20, 2019, Web.

SECTION FOUR: THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

The third and final example of using clothing as tools during protest movements in the 1960s included the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, which emerged from the civil rights movement of the 1960s-1970s. The Black Panther Party used militaristic uniforms that consisted of black berets, black leather jackets and assault rifles to regain their authority in their predominantly African-American communities, to protest the brutality and exploitation of African-Americans in the United States, and to call attention to the injustices that they felt African-American men, particularly, were facing during the 1960s.

Although the civil rights movement started in the early 1900s, it began gaining speed and traction in American society during the 1950s and 1960s as African-Americans across the South protested for desegregation in public facilities and in education, as well as fighting for the right to be seen as equals to their white counterparts. Although there were landmark victories for the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s—including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prohibited discrimination in public places and prohibited employment discrimination, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 which protected minority voting rights, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968 which provided equal housing opportunities regardless of race—many African-Americans still felt disenfranchised in society within the context of their daily lives, and many civil rights protesters and supporters were met with hostility, racially-motivated violence and police brutality.

It was this disenfranchisement experienced by many African-American individuals in society that caused Huey Newton and Bobby Seale to form the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in 1966 in Oakland, California, as a way to reclaim black power in the predominantly-African-American communities in the city. According to Black Past, an independent non-profit

organization focused on historic preservation, the ideology of the Black Panther Party was based on the teachings of socialist revolutionary leaders, like Mao Zedong, leader of communist China, and Latin American revolutionary Che Guevara³⁸. The Black Panthers saw the black community in America as being exploited by white businessmen, the government, and the police, and they soon became one of the most famous “black power” organizations in American history, with over 30 national chapters in major American cities like Los Angeles, Chicago, New York City and Seattle³⁹.



Figure 10. Black Panthers members line up at a rally in Oakland’s Defremery Park in 1969. (Stephen Shames, *Power to the People: The World of the Black Panthers*)

One of the ways the Black Panthers sought to regain control of their urban communities was organizing armed patrols with their members in order to follow the police as they patrolled around black communities, and during these patrols, members of the Black Panther Party dressed in specific uniforms, including a black leather jacket, a powder-blue button-up shirt, a black beret and an assault rifle each member carried with them. While assault rifles might not be considered an “accessory” by some, the definition of *accessory* is “a thing added to another in order to make it more useful or attractive,” which, in this case, could classify the Black Panthers’ assault rifles because they were added to their group’s uniforms to make their appearance more

³⁸ Collisson, Craig, “Black Panther Party,” *BlackPast.org: Remembered & Reclaimed*, Accessed Dec 3, 2018, Web.

³⁹ Collisson, Craig, “Black Panther Party,” *BlackPast.org: Remembered & Reclaimed*, Accessed Dec 3, 2018, Web.

useful for their protests. Therefore, the assault rifles were critical pieces of the uniforms of the Black Panthers and were accessories to their clothing.

The clothing that the Black Panthers wore, along with their assault rifle accessories, created a menacing presence to people who opposed them and their cause, and according to one New York Times article called “The Call of the Black Panthers,” the look of many young black people, particularly black men, wearing black leather jackets and carrying assault rifles created the idea of the Black Panthers as “an armed invasion,⁴⁰” which allowed them to signify their military discipline. Despite their portrayal in many newspaper articles, the Black Panther Party was not created to be an armed invasion against the whites, but rather, it was a group of African-American men who wanted to protest the society in which they lived and protest the injustices that they felt African-American men were experiencing during the 1960s.

However, as described in the *New York Times* article, when about 20 members of the party entered the State Legislature of Sacramento, California, in order to be present during the voting of a pending bill which would impose severe restrictions on the carrying of loaded weapons in public, they walked right past the guards and walked into the Assembly, which startled the public. Because the public was afraid of how the Black Panthers looked and their militaristic appearances, the 18 members of the group were eventually arrested and released on bail for disrupting the State Legislature and conspiring to disrupt the State Legislature. Despite the fear they instilled in the public who were attending the meeting, the article stated that the Black Panthers only attended the session to make a statement to the general public and to their city legislators⁴¹. As stated in the article:

⁴⁰ Stern, Sol, “The Call of the Black Panthers,” *The New York Times (1923-Current file)*: 186. Aug 6, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

⁴¹ Stern, Sol, “The Call of the Black Panthers,” *The New York Times (1923-Current file)*: 186. Aug 6, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

“As lobbyists, the Black Panthers are not very effective; but then, the Panthers did not really care much whether the gun bill passed or not. Their purpose was to call attention to their claim that black people in the ghetto must rely on armed self-defense and not the white man’s courts to protect themselves.⁴²”

As stated in the article, the Black Panthers felt that they needed to dress in their uniforms in order to protest their society and to call attention to the grievances that black people were experiencing in American society in the 1960s, despite the legal civil rights victories in that decade. As this was their reason for wearing their uniforms, it was their form of protest in order to call attention to the injustices that they felt African-American men were facing during the 1960s.

The uniforms of the Black Panthers were also designed to reclaim their authority in their communities and to promote “black power” against the police brutality they experienced because many black people, particularly young black men, felt like they had no other option than to stand up for themselves and join the Black Panthers as a way to protest their society and send a message to the white people who they felt were exploiting them. This was proven by a quote from Bobby Seale in the article from *The New York Times*, where he said, “The ghetto black isn’t afraid to stand up to the cops because he already lives with violence. He expects to die any day.⁴³”

Through the use of their militaristic uniforms, which consisted of black leather jackets, black berets, and assault rifles, the Black Panther Party of Self-Defense helped to protest the

⁴² Stern, Sol, “The Call of the Black Panthers,” *The New York Times (1923-Current file)*: 186. Aug 6, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

⁴³ Stern, Sol, “The Call of the Black Panthers,” *The New York Times (1923-Current file)*: 186. Aug 6, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

brutality and exploitation of African-Americans in the United States and call attention to the injustices that they felt African-American men were facing during the 1960s.

CONCLUSION

Although clothing has been an underrated tool utilized in social and political protest movements throughout American history, its use became most prevalent in the twentieth century with each decade using clothing and accessories to protest society in unique ways. In particular, the 1960s became famous for some of the most memorable protest movements of the twentieth century using clothing and accessories as symbolic forms of expression and rebellion against the traditions, standards and rules of society, and these protest movements including the anti-Vietnam War movement, the women's rights movement, and the civil rights movement.

Supporters of the anti-Vietnam War movement used black armbands, long hair, and bell-bottoms as a symbolic way to express their disapproval for the war and the draft, to defy the expectations of the previous generations, particularly regarding the expressions for men during the 1960s, and to create community among one another in their movement. Supporters of the Women's Liberation Movement who protested against the Miss America pageant in 1968 used the removal of clothing pieces like bras and high heels as a symbolic form of protest in order to protest the swimsuit portion of the Miss America pageant, as well as protest the overall objectification of women in American society. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense used their militaristic uniforms of black berets, black leather jackets and assault rifles to regain their authority in their predominantly African-American communities, to protest the brutality and exploitation of African-Americans in the United States, and to call attention to the injustices that they felt African-American men, particularly, were facing during the 1960s.

Regarding the success of these protest movements, I think the degree of success for whether or not the protests were effective varied, but the use of clothing in those protests helped to make them memorable in American history, which can be interpreted as achieving success.

The anti-Vietnam War movement can be seen as an effective protest movement because according to the *International Center on Nonviolent Conflict*, although the Vietnam War did not end until 1975, the anti-war movement caused hundreds of thousands of young Americans to become radicalized in a largely nonviolent culture of war resistance. Through continually protesting and opposing the war through anti-war activities like resisting the draft on a larger scale, it ultimately led to an end of U.S. combat operations in Vietnam and a suspension of the draft in 1973⁴⁴. The protests continued and grew more popular into 1968, which was the year when the U.S. troop levels in Vietnam peaked at 540,000 and more than 300 Americans were being killed every week⁴⁵. Many of the protesters engaged in “countercultural” lifestyles, or lifestyles that directly opposed the mainstream society, and these lifestyles included wearing the clothing that many protesters in the anti-war movement were famous for wearing, including bell-bottoms and long hair.

Although there is not a lot of research that has been conducted about the effectiveness of the protest clothing utilized in the anti-war movement, the movement became famous in American history for the look that many of the protesters promoted, and images of the protesters featured the clothing they used in their protests to defy society’s standards and create community among one another. Another example of how significant the style was for the anti-war protest movement could be found in the musical *Hair*, which brought the anti-war movement into the faces of mainstream America. Because the production built a worldwide audience of 30 million within four years of production⁴⁶, the show developed the ideas that long hair was a symbolic

⁴⁴ Zunes, Stephen, & Jesse Laird, “The US Anti-Vietnam War Movement (1964-1973),” *International Center on Nonviolent Conflict* (January 2010), Accessed April 10, 2019, Web.

⁴⁵ Zunes, Stephen, & Jesse Laird, “The US Anti-Vietnam War Movement (1964-1973),” *International Center on Nonviolent Conflict* (January 2010), Accessed April 10, 2019, Web.

⁴⁶ Moore, John, “The dangerous history of ‘Hair,’” *The Denver Post*, Sept. 29, 2011, Accessed Dec. 1, 2018, Web.

expression of nonconformity in the anti-war movement, as well as showing how hair was a tool used to protest the Vietnam War. In my interview with Dr. Harkins, he said, “*Hair* was an acknowledgement of the counterculture movement. I think it was a challenge to the long-standing standards of gender and middle-class-ness in mainstream society.⁴⁷” Therefore, because it became a successful musical production and has still continued to be produced by theaters nationwide, it remains one of the most significant legacies of the anti-war movement from the 1960s.

In addition, the black armbands that Mary Beth Tinker, John Tinker, and Chris Eckhardt used to protest the Vietnam War in *Tinker v. Des Moines* have become historic examples of protest clothing because *Tinker v. Des Moines* became one of the most significant First Amendment rights cases in American history, thus making the use of the black armbands in the case a successful example of protest clothing worn in the anti-Vietnam War movement. Therefore, the anti-war protests helped to turn sentiment against the war, became a memorable protest movement in American history, and created a legacy of the movement through its commemoration and continuation of some of the use of protest clothing in America today. Overall, the anti-Vietnam War protest movement is a successful example of a protest movement that created more awareness for the continuation and escalation of the war.

Regarding the success of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, later named simply the Black Panther Party, it can be concluded that the Black Panther Party’s protest, as part of the Civil Rights movement, was overall a successful example of protest, even though the group lost its influence as a political force into the early 1970s⁴⁸. According to the *Encyclopedia of the*

⁴⁷ Harkins, Tony (WKU History Professor). “Interview with” Nicole Ziege. Interview March/27/2019.

⁴⁸ The Black Panther Party became weakened by external attacks, legal problems and internal conflicts between the leaders of the group. Carson, Clayborne, & David Malcolm Carson, “Black Panther Party,” *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, edited by Mari Jo Buhle et al. (New York: Garland Publishing), 1990.

American Left, the Black Panther Party became the most widely known black militant political organization of the late 1960s. Its message supporting and promoting “black power” in the country helped them recruit young African-American people from urban areas, who wore the group’s famous uniforms of black berets and black leather jackets⁴⁹.



Figure 11. Tweet posted by the Dream Defenders, Beyoncé’s background dance troupe, showing the dancers raising their fists and wearing black leather outfits and black berets, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Black Panther Party. (Dream Defenders, Feb. 7, 2016, 6:39 PM, <https://twitter.com/Dreamdefenders/status/6965236>.)

The outfits that the group wore as part of their protests against the disenfranchisement of African-Americans during the 1960s have become the symbolic representation of showing support for African-American people and the Black Panther Party. This can be proven by Beyoncé, famous American singer and songwriter, and her background dancers wearing outfits inspired by the Black Panther Party for Beyoncé’s half-time show

performance in the 50th Super Bowl in 2016. The group wore outfits of black leather that

⁴⁹ Carson, Clayborne, & David Malcolm Carson, “Black Panther Party,” *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, edited by Mari Jo Buhle et al. (New York: Garland Publishing), 1990.

represented the black leather jackets worn by the Black Panthers, and the background dancers for the superstar wore black berets. According to an article by *The Guardian* covering the performance and its political statement, Beyoncé and her performers wanted to pay homage to the Black Panthers, along with the Black Lives Matter protest movement of the 21st century and African-American leader Malcolm X, because it was the 50th anniversary that year of the formation of the Black Panthers. This can be proven by a Twitter post from the background dancers embedded into the *Guardian* story that featured the dancers backstage, holding their fists in the air—representing Tommie Smith and John Carlos’s protest during the 1968 Olympic Games—while wearing their black leather uniforms and black berets. The post stated: “Beyoncé’s dancers in black berets at #SB50 [Super Bowl 50] paying homage to the Black Panthers 50 years after their #formation in ’66.⁵⁰” (See Figure 11) It can be inferred that the Black Panther Party’s protest and the clothing they utilized in their protest has had significant historical significance as the fight for “black power” has continued in American history because the uniforms they used to protest were the inspiration for the uniforms worn by Beyoncé and her background dancers during their Super Bowl half-time show, which was viewed by approximately 111 million people, the third largest Super Bowl audience in TV history as of 2016⁵¹. Therefore, the protest of the Black Panthers was not only successful as a movement in support of the rights of African-American people in the United States, but it was also a successful example of a protest that effectively used clothing to symbolize their movement and their group in order to bring awareness to the issues that African-American were facing in 1960s,

⁵⁰ Elgot, Jessica. “Beyoncé unleashes Black Panthers homage at Super Bowl 50,” *The Guardian*, Feb. 8, 2016, Web.

⁵¹ Pallotta, Frank, & Brian Stelter, “Super Bowl 50 audience is third largest in TV history,” *CNN Business*, Feb. 8, 2016, Web.

as well as used to symbolize the protest against the issues that African-American people continue to face today.

For the 1968 Miss America protest, as part of the women's liberation movement, the protest itself did not stop the Miss America pageant's swimsuit competition or spark a change in how the competition operated because the pageant did not stop that portion of the event until 2018, when pageant officials announced the change as a means to redefine its role in an era of female empowerment and gender equality⁵². However, it can be inferred that the protesters' use of removing their clothing items and accessories during the protest caused the protest and the women's liberation movement to stand out among twentieth-century American history, particularly among the decade of the 1960s.

One significant part of what made the 1968 Miss America protest significant historically in the twentieth century, with regard to the clothing used in the protest, was the myth in which the protesters were supposedly burning their bras during the protest and throwing them into the freedom trash can. In some ways, during the decade of the 1960s, that myth might have hindered the success and legacy of the protest in a short-term scale because it created an image around the protesters that was not as accepted in the mainstream society, which was the image of angry, unshaven feminists with their breasts free from constraint who were setting fire to their bras, demanding their liberation⁵³. However, into the 21st century, based on researching the significance of the protest, historians have considered the 1968 Miss America protest to be one of the most symbolic moments for when the women's liberation movement stepped out into the mainstream to express their frustrations with society, and the protesters' use of clothing and

⁵² Haag, Matthew, & Cara Buckley, "Miss America Ends Swimsuit Competition, Aiming to Evolve in 'This Cultural Revolution,'" *The New York Times*, June 5, 2018, Web.

⁵³ Gay, Roxane, "Fifty Years Ago, Protesters Took on the Miss America Pageant and Electrified the Feminist Movement," *Smithsonian Magazine* (January 2018), Web.

accessories has become one of the most memorable aspects of the protest. Therefore, although it cannot be said that the Miss America protest of 1968 helped to create change in the Miss America pageant, the protest's legacy of its use of clothing to symbolize the protesters' dissatisfaction with society ultimately made it a memorable example of a protest movement in the 1960s.

During the 1960s, these three separate protest movements, which developed from societal griefs and desires for equality, defied the traditional standards of American life and ideologically divided the younger and older generations, creating one of the most tumultuous decades in American history.

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