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EDITORIAL

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Expanding the narrative: ‘Fashion, Style, Aesthetics and #BlackLivesMatter’¹

The battle for liberation was waged through black people’s everyday encounters with one another and with their white counterparts and through cultural practices, making beauty and fashion a vital arena for struggle alongside formal politics.

(Ford 2015: 5)

Fashion (or clothing; we can debate what we should call it) isn’t on the sidelines in this: it’s a constant ally in times of trouble, a medium open to infinite nuances of meaning in the hands of ingenious people to show their beliefs.

(Mower 2018)

1. The guest editors for this Special Issue stand in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement and its founders: Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi.

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Fashion, style and aesthetics and their connection to social movements are as noticeable today as in the past when Vietnam protestors wore the peace symbol (thanks to Gerald Holtom, who championed disarmament in 1958). Each concept intersects and collectively serves as symbolic and effective forms of communication for marginalized groups (as well as their allies) posing 'radical questions' and seeking social change (Doer 2016: 205–07; Melucci 1989: 12). For example, African American civil rights protestors during the late nineteenth to twentieth century fashioned themselves in European–American clothing. They wore their 'Sunday Best' to present a respectable image – from Victorian-era, three-piece tailored suits with shirts and bow ties for men, and fitted-bodice, long-sleeve blouses for women. In the 1950s, the men wore two-piece suits, white shirts and ties. Women wore skirts, cardigans and pearls. This was how they wanted the White mainstream to see them at protests (Mhoon 2004: 26–28; Ford 2013). Since emancipation, African Americans collectively sought to be fully recognized as citizens under the law and the U.S. Constitution (under the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments). Most importantly, they wanted to dispel negative stereotypes and racist tropes about their appearance.

There are practical and aesthetic purposes for marginalized groups to adopt fashion choices during social movements. White was the official colour of suffragettes in the early twentieth century. Suffragettes adopted the colour white because it signified purity and femininity; they hoped to appear less intimidating. As the women's suffrage movement grew, White became an accessible and affordable way for all suffragettes (in spite of racial identity and socioeconomic status) to be uniformed and eye-catching in black-and-white photographs published in newspapers (Shaw 2020).

Throughout the history of protest, fashion, style and aesthetics have played a significant role in communicating various messages of oppression. We are living in a unique moment: the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, one that mirrors the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. In comparison, in the age of the BLM movement, we often find protestors in casual clothes or athleisure wear (t-shirts, 'joggers' and sneakers). Instead of activists using protest signs as they did during the Civil Rights movement, today's outfits *are* the protest signs. Modern athleisure wear is not just fashionable and utilitarian; it is also a form of social protest and self-affirmation. In the aftermath of his death, Trayvon Martin's hoodie, most notably, serves as a symbol of resistance.

The BLM rally call was coined in 2013 in response to the 2012 murder of Trayvon Martin (a 17-year-old Black youth) and the subsequent acquittal of his murderer, George Zimmerman (a self-proclaimed neighbourhood watchman). These series of events proved to be a breaking point for Black people in the United States, who have experienced a long history of White violence in the nation (Holmes 2017: 142–43). While the focus of the BLM movement is considered centred in the United States, BLM has become a global movement and has expanded its agenda. This movement includes the advocacy and protection of Black immigrants/undocumented Black immigrants and the fight against disinformation, among other issues (Black Lives Matter 2020). In Yadira Perez Hazel's article 'Black Lives Matter in Australia', she shows that the BLM has grown into a global movement in which members of the African diaspora outside the United States are able to organize and protest not only White violence but also problems perpetuated by institutionalized racism. She notes, 'the Black Lives Matter movement in Australia has provided a platform

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from which local organizations, community groups, activist, artists, and agitators [have] engaged various social, environmental, and humanitarian issues' (Hazel 2017: 126).

In sync with the expansion of BLM both globally and agenda-wise, the BLM movement has also impacted fashion. In a July 2016 op-ed piece titled 'Why I stand with Black Lives Matter' in *W. Magazine*, fashion design Maxwell Osborne issued a call to his colleagues in the fashion industry to support BLM. He says, '[a]s a designer, they've [BLM] made me question what my role is in all of this. What can I do? I decided that I could no longer just sit on the sidelines' (Osborne 2016). While Osborne issued the call, designers such as Kerby Jean-Raymond have successfully integrated fashion with BLM. In September 2015, he made a splash during the *New York Fashion Week* with a show featuring his line (Pyer Moss) integrating issues associated with BLM. Furthermore, many fashion designers and artists have successfully used social media platforms' statement t-shirts/sweatshirts, jewellery, bags and other forms of fashion and accessories. In the age of social media, especially Instagram and Twitter, there is a trend where celebrities and everyday people have effectively used these platforms to express their support (protest t-shirts, images and symbols) through fashion.

Historian Keeanga Yamahtta-Taylor argues that the movement, which has galvanized a diverse coalition of allies, defines our time as a commentary against the status quo (Kelly 2020). What can be called the infamous 'Summer of 2020' illustrates this pivotal moment, further elevated by the police killing of Breonna Taylor in her Louisville, Kentucky home during a no-knock warrant on 13 March 2020. Also, that summer a horrified public saw a Minneapolis, Minnesota street arrest in which a police officer pressed his knee into the neck of George Floyd for eight minutes and 46 seconds, causing Floyd's death on 25 May 2020. Two ills existed that summer: a killer viral pandemic and deaths stemming from racism. Taylor says these times mark 'rage and frustration', enough so that people have taken to the streets to 'fight for a different kind of reality' (Kelly 2020: par. 11).

In this issue, 'Fashion, Style, Aesthetics, and #BlackLivesMatter', we are pleased to present a collection of (five) original full-length articles as well as a design concept, a book review and three enlightening interviews/commentaries; all centred on how fashion intimately relates to BLM. While the dominant narrative surrounding BLM remains within the context of police brutality and the social/intellectual movements associated with it, this Special Issue seeks to highlight the message of BLM and provide a unique take on it through the lens of fashion, style and aesthetics. This Special Issue of *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture* explains how fashion can help people promote social change.

This Special Issue begins with a collection of full-length articles. Molly Desjardin's article, "'A mirror to the room": Pyer Moss, specular strategy and Black Lives Matter' looks at the Pyer Moss show. Desjardin describes how the show self-consciously connects violence by the state against Black people with the history of racial brutality against the black body. Next, Melodie Davis-Bundrage, Katalin Medvedev and Jori N. Hall offer us 'How beauty products use links to Black Lives Matter: Examining beliefs of health threats' influence on behaviour'. This study investigates if Black women use natural and organic products to avoid detrimental health threats and injustice in their lives. The findings provide valuable insights into Black women's lives as consumers, showing the importance of beauty product toxicity and healthy product development as topics of concern within the BLM movement.

Fanny Adams Quagraine, Afia Dentaa Dankwa and Alan Anis Mirhage Kabalan present a study exploring Ghanian female youth's perception of what constitutes a 'beautiful' hairstyle in a non-western space. The article presents unique findings and serves as a call to action for more studies examining beauty and style within an African context. The piece captures the experiences of the African diaspora and expands the conversation, speaking to a movement fighting for an expanded social reality.

The article '#BlackRepresentationsMatter: Viewing digital activism through symbology' is by Alundra Shealey. While there are criticisms that the digital infrastructure constructs pseudo-mobilization, the purpose of this article is to refute this belief, showing that online practices can manifest themselves in physical agencies. Shealey maintains that customers will seek out products that reflect their sense of self.

Rounding out this section, Lewis Van Dyk provides us with the article 'Using autopoiesis to discover the birth of fashion'. Van Dyk explains that fashion scholarship has followed a limited version of history, a view that permeates museology, teaching and fashion design. This taught view claims that fashion was formed in Bruges, Belgium during the birth of capitalism, between 1280 and 1390. The author offers up a different view, discussing how personal and social fashion might be formed at a nascent level, which is detectable in the Mursi and Omo people. Van Dyk asks us to reconsider when the historical gaze commences, and where geographically it falls.

On the topic of design concept, author LaPorchia Davis talks about crafting and engineering sneakers that can be both stylish and functional for people diagnosed with diabetes. Her article is 'Designed for diabetic health! Exploratory sneaker changing the direction in footwear for the Black community'. By promoting awareness of preventive measures that can be undertaken to improve quality of life, this sneaker design concept will help individuals in the Black community with diabetes to become more physically active.

Next, this issue feature three interviews/commentaries. Guest editor Travis Boyce contributed two interviews: 'Sneakers, corporate attitudes, and the Black Lives Matter movement' and "'We, too, share their heritage and culture": An interview with Corin Lindsay, co-founder of Corin DeMarco'. In 'Sneakers, corporate attitudes, and the Black Lives Matter movement', sneaker expert Sean Williams offers a critique of the culture and attitudes of fashion/sneaker industries regarding social movements such as the BLM movement. Boyce's second interview features Corin Lindsay, co-founder of Corin Demarco, a fashion line that markets premium quality sportswear apparel featuring Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). This interview shows that HBCUs are not just educational institutions, but are embedded in culture and reflected in the fashion choices of African Americans, especially during the resurgence (the 'Summer of 2020') of the BLM movement. In 'Equality starts with conversation: An interview with designer Elijah Justice', guest co-editor Winsome M. Chunnu takes us into an artist's creative mind. Justice's objective for his Face It Collection was to design, screen print and display clothing to represent when and how one may encounter racism. He means to encourage the wearer to engage in conversation with those around them.

This Special Issue concludes with a book review by guest co-editor Lisa D. Lenoir, examining historian Tanisha C. Ford's *Dressed in Dreams: A Black Girl's Love Letter to the Power of Fashion*. This book makes it clear that there is power in getting dressed and being innovative. Ford argues people from marginalized groups do it well, and she situates pieces such as the dashiki and hoodie

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as well as hairstyles such as the Afro puff and Jheri Curl in a social, cultural and political historiography.

This timely Special Issue, like any scholarly collaborative production, would not have come to fruition if it were not for the dedication and support of its contributors. To that end, we would like to thank Dr. Joseph Hancock, II, editor-in-chief of the *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture* as well as Laura Christopher of Intellect Press for their support of this project. Additionally, we would also like to thank the reviewers and contributors for their hard work in making this project a reality. 'Fashion, Style, Aesthetics and #BlackLivesMatter' provokes thought about the voice of social change. When people want to be heard, they use fashion as a visual statement. When people must be heard, they embody the message. From personal style to group aesthetics, *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture* examines the fascinating range of human expression. We look forward to your thoughts on this issue and hope you enjoy, 'Fashion, Style, Aesthetics and #BlackLivesMatter'.



Figures 1–3: Guest Editors Travis D Boyce, San José State University; Lisa D. Lenoir, University of Missouri-Columbia; Winsome M. Chunnu, Ohio University. Photos Courtesy of the Editors, 2021.

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