

## The Fashion and Race Database

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### THE FASHION AND RACE DATABASE

It's time to  
decentralize the study  
of fashion.

The Fashion and Race Database is an online platform filled with open-source tools that expand the narrative of fashion history and challenge mis-representation within the fashion system. Est. 2017.

ENTER

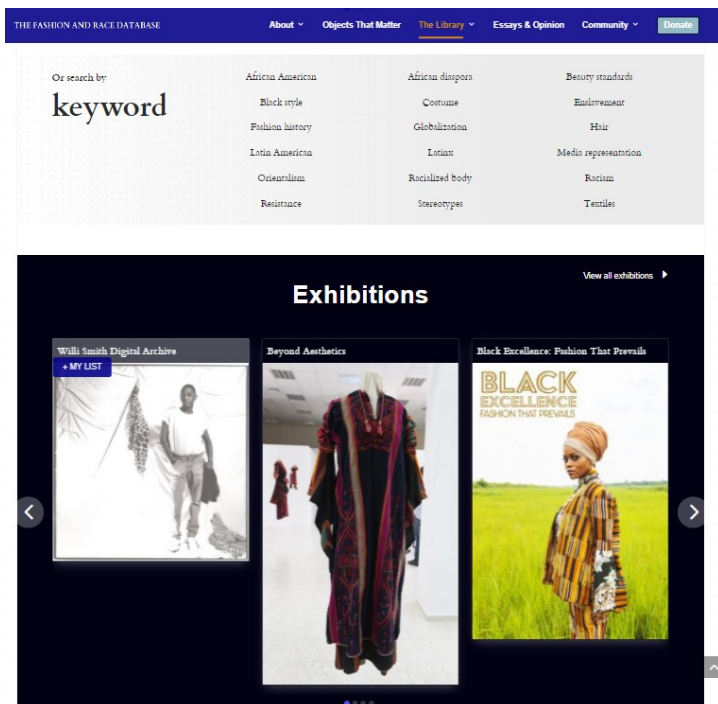
The Fashion and Race Database is a platform that aims to “decentralize the study of fashion,” filling an important void in fashion scholarship. Founded in 2017 and relaunched in July of this year, the database is a response to a Euro-centric framework of fashion history and theory, with goals of amplifying BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) perspectives and

broadening the traditional narrative. Kimberly Jenkins, assistant professor at Ryerson University’s School of Fashion in Toronto, began the project after struggling with the lack of pedagogical resources that acknowledge the complex cultural and historical contexts that impact fashion studies. As she gathered sources for her own courses related to race, power, representation and marginalization, she found herself building a collection that informed the creation of the platform as it exists today.

That collection formed the basis of “The Library,” the largest and most used section of the Fashion and Race Database. The Library is a continually expanding repository that encompasses books, films, lectures, exhibitions, podcasts, and scholarly and popular articles. Users are given the option to browse only open-access content, as some sites may have a paywall. The design separates content by medium and displays a curated selection of content in carousels. An additional access point is the “search by keyword” section, where users are presented with a list of example terms such as “Costume” and “Media representation.” This phrasing is slightly misleading as users cannot currently use their own keywords to search, but must browse using these preselected tags. A search box appears at the top of page, but it searches the entire website. As the collection grows, it would be beneficial to provide an Advanced Search feature. Nevertheless, the suggested keywords offer an excellent opportunity to encourage exploration throughout the repository, and a “My List” feature allows users to create their own personal list

of resources. Educators, students and researchers will be well-served by this growing collection of content. However, an accessibility checker revealed numerous issues that need addressing to better accommodate users with disabilities. The database’s inclusive mission would be better served with more emphasis on accessibility in the design of the page, so that all users can easily interact with these carefully curated resources.

With the recent relaunch, Jenkins has brought together a small team and is actively seeking new content from contributors to highlight voices and stories that have been traditionally under-examined. The “Objects that Matter” section features objects from different cultures, such as burkinis and moccasins, and recontextualizes the histories of these objects. A different item is featured every week. The pages share a visually appealing and consistent design, with authors using the same sections to form a complete profile of the life of the object. At the time of review, there are nine objects; as the collection grows, it may be useful to introduce some controlled vocabulary so that researchers can easily view connections between different objects. Each page begins with examples of the object in art, photography, or museum collections. The “Appropriation and Influence” section of the page catalogs examples of how the object has been appropriated in modern fashion, entertainment, or consumer culture. Seeing these examples grouped together reveals how objects have been divorced from their cultural contexts to be sold as commodities. Users will find it inspiring to see how the database resituates these objects, illuminating their historical significance.



### Description

Navajo blankets are carefully constructed textiles that embody a cultural appreciation for craftsmanship, innovation and individuality. Weaving is an important aspect of Navajo or Diné society and spirituality. Communities banded together to raise sheep and women took to the forefront as weavers. In Navajo legend, Spider-Man taught the Navajo how to create the loom out of their surroundings, and Spider-Woman (the first to weave the web of the universe) taught them the beauty of weaving. Under this guidance, Navajo weavings are remarkably created without preliminary sketches or outlines, each design is extremely personal to the creator.

The main distinctions of Navajo blankets are Serapes (shoulder blankets), Saddle blankets and Chief's blankets. Chief's blankets are the finest and most expensive Navajo textiles. Although the Navajo do not have chief distinctions in their culture, these blankets were named because only someone wealthy such as a chief could afford one. Chief's blankets were highly prized and often traded with settlers or other tribes where they were to be used in ceremonies. When worn in the traditional manner – draped over the back– Serape and Chief's blankets emphasize the strength of the wearer, presenting them as an idealized being. Styles and patterns in Navajo weaving evolved over time as they were always dependent on the resources available. Early Navajo blankets were limited to the natural colour palette of the wool and used more simplistic banded patterns. As synthetic dyes were invented and trade with settlers became more common, Navajo blankets began demonstrating their more iconic colours and bold graphic patterns. Today Navajo blankets are widely recognized for beauty, quality and resilience.

### Details

<b>Location</b>	Southwestern United States (Arizona, Utah, New Mexico)
<b>Culture</b>	Navajo (Diné)
<b>Time Period</b>	Late 1600s – present
<b>Materials</b>	Wool, sometimes cotton or other natural fibers are incorporated.
<b>Construction</b>	Navajo Blankets are woven using a tight weft faced plain weave, also known as a tapestry weave.
<b>Usage</b>	The wearing of Navajo blankets is not restricted to specific ritual or ceremonial occasions. Typically the finer Chief's Blankets have also been used for special events or used by other tribes in their ceremonies. Navajo blankets are also used on saddles or for draping, sitting, sleeping or hung over a door.

Though some sections are little sparse, the team is rapidly adding new content. Users are invited to subscribe to a newsletter to learn about the newest additions to the database, and the website keeps track of inspirational projects in “The Directory” and relevant events in the “The Calendar.” Still to come is a “Profiles” section that highlights the contributions of BIPOC figures who have been overlooked in the

academic canon or erased from historical narratives. While the “Essays & Opinions” section currently has only one article, this promises to change soon due to the project’s emphasis on providing publishing opportunities to BIPOC writers and allies. The Fashion and Race Database is a vitally important and ambitious endeavor, one that promises to benefit educators, students, and anyone seeking to learn about how fashion and race intersect. It will be exciting to keep an eye on this space as the Database grows to encompass more content and diverse voices, build additional functionality, and develop into an invaluable authority on underrepresented histories and stories.