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SUMPTUARY LEGISLATION AND THE FABRIC CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

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This paper researches the ways in which clothing and fashion in sixteenth-century England were controlled by the government as a means to enforce the established social order. Tudor sumptuary laws were a key aspect of the monarchy's attempt to regulate consumption, particularly as it relates to outward displays of status and wealth. This project also explores the semiotics of clothing and the cultural implications of dress and manners. Fashion was an indicator of social position, and as social mobility in England increased under the Tudor and Stuart monarchs, the crown and the nobility responded with regulatory restrictions in their attempt to retain power and authority. Overall, early modern Englishmen defined English identity as expressed through cultural mores but especially through apparel in contrast to their perceptions of other nations, thus establishing a system of status identification based upon clothing.