



THE AFRICAN ROOTS OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN AESTHETIC OF DRESS

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The purpose of the study was to garner evidence that links the African American aesthetic of dress to West African Countries and the Congo. Data sources were journals and biographies of slave traders and formally enslaved Africans, as well as slave narratives.

Evidence was found to link the dress of African Americans, enslaved Africans, and West Coast Africans. For example, the passion for fine apparel [dressing up] is evident among current day African Americans and is seen also in the dynamic nature in which dress is worn. Chuiickshank (1853) observed similarities in the dress of Gold Coast natives: "[they] ... are particularly fond of dress....Wealthy people indulge in frequent changes of apparel, Even the poorer classes have several changes, They are particular in having the part of their dress of the finest texture. It is very frequently of silk, of a showy colour [high affect colors], and they allow the ends of fringes to fall down the side of the leg [style], that it may occasionally be seen upon any disarrangement of the upper robe, The patterns and colours are selected according to the taste of the wearer, some preferring a neat modest print, while others delight in gaudy contrasts of colors [improvisations or exotic features]" (p. 281). All elements of the African American aesthetic of dress are found in this one illustration. Such evidence is found in works dating back to the 16th century.