

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

The "Stylish Battle"
World War II and Clothing Design Restrictions in Los Angeles

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

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December 2012

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Dissertation, as written, would not have been possible without the support of many. Research funding was partially supported by the Graduate Division of the University of California, Riverside in the form of the Dissertation Year Fellowship. I am also, without question, indebted to the Costume Society of American for their exceptional support. As the recipient of the Stella Blum Student Research Award, I received funding which allowed me to research my dissertation at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Archives of the Fashion Institute of Technology, the Manuscript and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, and the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. I also received funding to attend the National Symposium of the CSA in Boston in May 2011, and there received many suggestions and much needed encouragement. Additionally, through the Western Regional Branch of the Costume Society, I received the Jack Hanford Summer Internship Award. I received the funding to support a summer-long internship at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art during which I learned much about the history of western fashion and had the ability to research my own project. I am especially thankful to the staff at LACMA for their kind attention, especially Sharon Takeda and Clarissa Esguerra. I am also thankful at this opportunity to express my gratitude to my dissertation committee members Professors Molly McGarry and Susan Carter for their helpful comments and support. Finally, to Professor Gudis, my committee chair, thank

you for reading and re-reading so many drafts and pushing me to new levels with my dissertation.

Finally, I am very thankful for my family and friends who helped me survive graduate school. To my parents, Maureen and Michael Bellew, thank you for your unconditional love and support. I guess the lesson was learned. Never tell your child you will help them until they finish college: she may just get a Ph.D.! To my sister, Amanda Samdahl, I send many hugs and love. I would like to thank the family I gained in graduate school through marriage who had made me feel so welcomed: the Hannons, the Biens, and the Thompsons. Also, I thank my best girls for their continued friendship and love: Dawn Ladd, Monika Heller Roots, Jeanette Duffels, Christy McVicker Ryan, and Alanna Anderson.

Finally, and most importantly, I thank from the bottom of my heart my own little family of Hannons. To my husband, I am so happy I found you in graduate school. Thank you for giving me encouragement when I lost faith in myself (bump!); for your incredible humor and intelligence; and for being my “equal” in all things in life. You honestly make me a better person, pushing me to improve myself and broaden my mind. We did it together, and now we can finally be the “Doctors Hannon” together. To us. Thank you lastly, to our own UCR “little sprout.” Thank you, Scott, for bringing such joy to my life. If only I could see the world through your eyes. And thank you baby Hannon number 2, a.k.a. the “Peanut”, we cannot wait to meet you!

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

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University of California, Riverside, December 2012
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This dissertation explores Los Angeles fashion culture during the Second World War. The War Production Board’s General Limitation Order L-85, intended to limit excess use of war materials such as cotton and wool, took decisions over the measurements of clothing, the presence of embellishments, and the general silhouette of fashion out of the hands of fashion designers and placed them in the hands of government bureaucrats. Through L-85, the fashion industry once famous for its principle of planned obsolescence instead became an “effective mechanism” of war. Yet the industry did not merely produce L-85 compliant clothing; rather, it produced the aesthetic of “patriotic chic” that still functioned to foster consumption even as it did so under the rhetorical umbrella of saving and sacrifice. Moreover, the industry, guided by federal restrictions, helped individual consumers articulate and then demonstrate their connections to the war effort through their purchasing power. The alliances between government and industry forged through L-85 thus created an important wartime phenomenon of rational

consumption that tied together an ethos of sacrifice with an ethos of spending, intended to keep the wheels of consumption greased even during the war.

For their part, California sportswear designers used patriotic marketing strategies for stylized workwear and war-inspired ready-to-wear, informing consumers that by purchasing streamlined, simplified fashions they could, in the words of fashion designer Gilbert Adrian, “register taste without extravagance.” Hollywood costume designers backed by publicity professionals in studio “exploitation departments” provided women with patriotic stylistic inspiration. The studios also produced women’s interest home-front dramas that used the very bodies of their actresses and the costumes put upon them as the means of promoting homefront femininity and responsible female war work. By selling sacrifice through style, the studios and designers together modeled symbolic resistance to conservation, as did individual fashion mavens from Zoot Suiters to the seamstresses and shops that served them. Their examples also suggest the tensions of the wartime era, when fashion became a staging ground for nationalism and consumption.

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Introduction: The “Stylish Battle”

Ladies, there’s an invisible man stalking your steps! He follows you into shops, dragging a long tape measure behind him. He slips you into closets, peers under beds, into boxes, sneaks into drawers, snipping his sheers right in your ears. Have you seen him yet, cutting and measuring his way into your life? This pixie sort of fellow, this sprightly sprite conjured out of the smoke of war in the W.P.B office? This immaterial medium created as a material-saving device is the new style specter who’s running our American fashion show. For an intangible man, he has quite a tangible name. He’s called L-85.

Sylva Weaver, fashion columnist for the Los Angeles Times, included the above cartoon and humorous description in her article describing the fashion industry’s response to the War Production Board’s General Limitation Order L-85 (L-85). L-85, that “dictator of fashion,” or at least her personification of it, had a “single-track mind dedicated only to winning the war,” and would soon be transforming fashion for the sake of the war effort (Figure 1).¹

With the coming of the Second World War to the United States and the subsequent release of L-85 on April 8, 1942, decisions over the measurements of clothing (i.e. hem width or sleeve length), the presence of embellishments (i.e. pockets or dolman sleeves), and the general silhouette of fashion (i.e. relative skirt fullness) were taken out of the hands of fashion designers and placed under the control of a federal agency. The rationale behind the order was simple. Faced with shortages of raw materials, labor, and machinery time, the federal government had determined that the civilian production of

¹ Sylva Weaver, “Material-Saving War Styles to Make Milady Prettier,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1942.



Figure 1
 Sylva Weaver's L-85 Personified, 1942

clothing needed to be curtailed for the duration. Instead of restricting the number of garments a single citizen could purchase, WPB decided that they would control the industrial production of fashion, believing that simple changes to individual garments would result in a significant aggregate savings. Gone, as a result, as comically portrayed in Weaver's cartoon, were patch pockets, balloon sleeves, and other details using unnecessary amounts of fabric. Gone, too, were jackets, shawls, or capes sold as a unit with a matching dress. Again in the words of L-85 personified, "There! After a little trimming here, snipping here, and PRESTO! The Dress of tomorrow."

Skirts consequently got shorter and narrower with less intricacies of design. Natural shoulders with tapered sleeves replaced longer styles. Décolleté dress, meaning those with a low-cut neckline, became more common. Addie Masters, Louella Ballerino, Gilbert Adrian, and all other California based designers, like their counterparts in New York allowed war conditions (i.e. fabric scarcity and labor shortages) and wartime ideals (i.e. thrift and sacrifice) to be quietly represented in the clothing they produced. Fashion of the 1940s soon achieved its character defining features, and began to look distinctively different from fashion of the previous decade (Figure 2).

Only eight months earlier, in September 1941, Weaver had confidently asserted in the wake of the beginning of hostilities in Europe that "war or no war," her city, Los Angeles, was destined to become the new "fashion center of the world," and the war would only hasten the already inevitable.² The sudden loss of Paris as the center of worldwide fashion had shaken the U.S. fashion industry, and most did not immediately

² Sylva Weaver, "Queen of Style Sees Nears Southland Port," *Los Angeles Times*, September 17, 1941.



Figure 2
Sylva Weaver, "Smart Two-Piece Sport Suit in Sheer Wool for All-Day Wear;
New Fashion Trend of Season Marks Flattering Street Dress," October 8, 1934.

respond as confidently as Weaver. Indeed, an editorial in the *Tobe Fashion Reports*, one of the leading fashion trade publications in the United States, succinctly described the common response when the “whole structure of the fashion business had to be rebuilt.” “With the collapse of France and the German occupation of Paris,” it noted, “Paris couture was scattered to the four winds.” It continued, “And with them, of course, was the foundation of the fashion world as we have known it.” The editorial concluded by offering a few solutions. American designers, in the opinion of Tobe, needed to step it up and “begin immediately to build up authority for American designers as the creators of fashions for America.”³ If they did not, many assumed, deprived of the leadership of Paris and unable to act independently, the American fashion industry could very well collapse.⁴

Designers on both coasts soon responded to the call, and each received encouragement from their respective civic governments. Recognizing the economic potential of fashion, Mayor *Fiorello* La Guardia went on offensive and worked with the Fashion Group of New York to make his city “the center of fashion of the entire world” by organizing many promotional events.⁵ In Los Angeles, *Mayor* Fletcher Bowron did the same, serving as the honorary chairman for California Fashion Futures, a “banquet, dinner dance, and fashion show” organized by the Fashion Group of Los Angeles and held on February 13, 1941. “Coordinated style efforts,” Bowron noted in the Los

³ The Tobe Report as quoted by Sandra Stansbery Buckland, “Promoting American Fashion 1940 to 1945: From Understudy to Star” (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1996), 90-93.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

Angeles Times, "...cannot help but build a sounder California economy for us all, whether we are in civic, mercantile or private life."⁶

Sylva Weaver, again battling for Southern California, explained the advantages of the Los Angeles, implying that these would ensure the ultimate domination of the west coast over the east as the center of the fashion industry. Motion pictures, she boldly declared, were "the most effective propaganda medium for fashion, as well as everything else, the world has ever seen." This combined with the "millions of dollars promotional money spent on the stars and their wardrobes" and the "world's most beautiful women" had "changed the apparel-customs of every woman in the world."⁷ Women, in the opinion of Weaver, clearly desired nothing less than Hollywood-inspired, California-manufactured apparel. Others were not so certain. Gilbert Adrian, a.k.a. "Adrian," the head costume designer at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (M-G-M) and acknowledged fashion authority, informed American women that they should not think geographically when seeking fashion trends post-Paris. "So whether it be New York, Cairo, Walla Walla, or Hollywood," he advised, "watch for originality, inventiveness, [and] ideas." Gwen Wakeling, a costume designer at 20th Century-Fox, disagreed. Hollywood, in her opinion, was going to emerge as the "source of ideas, of inspiration," while New York would "be the place where these will be adapted and manufactured."⁸

⁶ "City Becomes Style Center," *Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 1940.

⁷ Sylva Weaver, "Queen of the Style Seas Nears Southland Port," *Los Angeles Times*, September 17, 1941; Sylva Weaver, "East and West Struggle for Fashion Dictatorship: But Experts Say Combination of Designer Talent and Lovely Women Gives California Advantage Over Rivals," *Los Angeles Times*, February 19, 1941.

⁸ Gwen Wakeling, "Two Cities to Set Pace for Fashions," *Los Angeles Times*, September 17, 1941;

The war and L-85 complicated the rivalry between New York and California as neither could pull out all the stops. Soon, both were single-mindedly waging what the *Wall Street Journal* would later dub the “stylish battle” for war and post-war fashion status. Given the new fashion environment, designers on both coasts reinvented themselves: they both declared individually that they, and they alone, would be the ones capable of dressing American women through the tough fashion times of war, both equally inferring that the other would necessarily do a worse job.⁹ Sylva Weaver, for her role, thus released and re-released articles describing the innovative fashion of Los Angeles created by both sportswear manufacturers and Hollywood costume designers. In April 1942, she present a sketching a new suit designed by Gilbert Adrian in “co-operation with L-85,” calling it a “handsome example of war-influenced streamlined style.” “A famous picture designer,” she happily reported, “now creating clothes for American women, calls this a war suit” (Figure 3). In August 1943, she presented the women of Los Angeles with photographs of the leading ladies of motion pictures wearing the designs of Hollywood’s influential costume designers, hoping to spark desire to similar fashions produced by California manufacturers, including the beautiful Ann Sheridan in Orry-Kelly (Figure 4).¹⁰

Gilbert Adrian, “Ideas Sole Arbiter of Style World,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 18, 1940.

⁹ Edgar W. Nassauer, “California Clothes,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 6, 1944.

¹⁰ Sylva Weaver, “Southland Styles,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 23, 1942; Sylva Weaver, “Seeing Styles,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 23, 1942.



Figure 3
Adrian's "War Suit," 1942

SEEING STYLES

WITH SYLVA WEAVER



Ann Sheridan's afternoon dress has a ruffled jabot reminiscent of George Washington's day. Designed by Orry-Kelly, it is black with rust and gold plaid taffeta trimming.

Figure 4

Ann Sheridan in Orry-Kelly

Sylva Weaver, "Seeing Styles with Sylva Weaver," August 23, 1942

While it is true that patriotic marketing strategies were used across the United States, they manifested differently in the city of Los Angeles, the city where the glamour of Hollywood combined with the active, outdoor lifestyle of sun, sand, and surf. Here, as part of that “stylish battle,” California designers claimed that they understood American women’s wartime mentality, and thereby their corresponding wartime fashion needs given the fact that they lived and worked in the “war zone” that was Los Angeles and witnessed the city’s mobilization and militarization. Here, California sportswear designers created and then aggressively marketed designer workwear modeled on stylish sportswear to anxious middle-class women entering the labor force for the first time who were afraid they would look masculine and working-class women who never before had money before to spend on designer fashions. And here, finally, the Hollywood film studios educated women on proper home-front fashion by first presenting them with the likes of Ingrid Bergman looking glamorous in patriotic (and plentiful) American cotton and then selling them licensed film-inspired merchandise.

This dissertation thus explores the wartime fashion world of Los Angeles, or in other words, the producers, marketers, and distributors of fashion required to bring style ideas into fruition amidst the historically unique environment of home-front Los Angeles. In doing so, this dissertation shifts the traditional focus of fashion scholarship from the east coast to the west, thereby expanding our understanding of the U.S. fashion industry.¹¹ My contention is that the Los Angeles fashion community, meaning both the

¹¹ For examples, see Sandra Stansbery Buckland, “Promoting American Fashion 1940 to 1945: From Understudy to Star” (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1996); Rebecca Arnold, *The American Look: Fashion, Sportswear, and the Image of Women in 1930s and 1940s New York* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

California sportswear designers with their ready-to-wear separates and the Hollywood film studios with their licensed merchandise, waged the “stylish battle” with

New York in the context of the Second World War and L-85 by capitalizing on the reputations of Hollywood specifically and Southern California generally; by profiting on California’s new status as the center of wartime defense production and military embarkation; by readjusting tried and true marketing strategies to attract a new range of war-rich clientele; and by self-consciously seeking to ease war-created social anxieties about patriotism in the face of consumption and changing gender roles and expectations. They thereby concocted thinly veiled, highly lucrative sales strategies designed to convince the women of the United States that they could provide what was needed: war appropriate, war inspired glamour, or in the words of Adrian, exactly what was required “to register taste without extravagance.”¹²

This dissertation will moreover illuminate the transformative, shaping power of Southern California generally and Hollywood specifically at the crucial junction of World War II in terms of inciting desires and directing consumption. Hollywood motion pictures, and the stars who transformed simple scripts into spectacular, glamour-filled extravaganzas, perpetuated the idea across the nation, and indeed across the world, that California was the source of all things luxurious. This added to the states’ already luminous reputation, secured in the 19th century when gold was found in the Sierra Nevadas. The presence of such material wealth along with the hope that one could get

¹² “One Frog Paddled,” *Time*, August 31, 1942, accessed May 16, 2012, <http://www.time.com>; “Legal Silhouette is Made a Virtue,” *New York Times*, August 25, 1942.

rich quick cemented the idea that California was the place to fulfill one's dreams. The creation of motion picture fan magazines in the 1920s and the development of studio "exploitation" departments that created synergetic tie-in campaigns further encouraged people outside the state to desire what California produced. Indeed, the Hollywood motion picture studios developed these strategies at the same time as the California fashion industry sought to transform sportswear from the clothing of recreation into smart street fashion, and each of these strategies fortified the other. Knowing they had themselves a captive audience, as emblematic modern corporation, the studios of Hollywood, following the principles of vertical integration and the techniques of product placement, sold everything from theater tickets to licensed copies of film costumes behind the compelling plotlines of their feature films. In the words of Margaret Throp's *America at the Movies* (1939), "neither adjectives nor photographs nor drawings can make a woman feel about an evening wrap as she feels when she sees it on the shoulders of Irene Dunne."¹³ From the sellers of bedroom sets to bathroom furnishings, American entrepreneurs marveled at Hollywood's ability to incite desire for consumer goods.¹⁴

With the coming of war, the power of Hollywood was only heightened. Given the perceived influence of Hollywood as a social authority, the Office of War Information (OWI) and the War Production Board (WPB) both mobilized the motion picture as a weapon of war, transforming the motion picture from simple entertainment into entertaining propaganda. Regardless, by developing a close, cooperative relationship

¹³ Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 2.

¹⁴ Charles Eckert, "The Carole Lombard in Macy's Window," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 3 (1978): 4-7.

with the federal government, the studios thrived, finding that they could simultaneously promote the war effort while effectively promoting themselves. Hollywood thus continued to sell, and sell quite effectively, both film tickets and fashion to the roughly 80 million Americans who watched movies weekly.¹⁵ Indeed, with so many men serving overseas, the studios believed that women were becoming easier targets for their sales promotion since they were now going to the movies by themselves without judgmental husbands who might have control of the family pursestrings.¹⁶ Consequently, the studios continually released women's interest pictures, and backed these with aggressive exploitation campaigns that highlighted the leading actresses' costumes.

Others, capitalizing on the famous beach lifestyle of the Pacific coast, sold California-inspired sportswear, first as the apparel of recreation and beachcombing, and later as smart, casual street fashion that could take its wearer straight from the pool to the town in a matter of seconds.¹⁷ Beginning in the 1930s, these manufacturers sought to transform the idealized myth of California into a concrete business strategy. They proudly attached "Made in California" labels onto their slacks, swimsuits, and playclothes, knowing that the rest of the nation would automatically think of bronzed, blonde-haired starlets and seek to emulate them.

¹⁵ Kevin Starr, *Embattled Dreams: California in War and Peace* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 165.

¹⁶ Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 153.

¹⁷ Wendy Kaplan, ed., *California Design, 1930--1965: Living in a Modern Way* (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2011), 246.

Even further, this analysis will tease out consumption-based tensions between the American government and the American business community that emerged during the Second World War in response to federal restrictions in the marketplace. War mobilization brought money into the long empty pockets of a growing stratum of the American people, and many desired to spend their newly earned cash, much to the excitement of eager entrepreneurs. Yet, just when people gained the ability to spend, the federal government insisted they stop and conserve for the war effort, much to the chagrin of the business community. While the growing civilian market had promised staggering profits for business, dealing with the government now seemed to promise only stagnation.

Soon, American entrepreneurs found themselves caught between competing impulses. Should they as patriotic citizens cooperate with wartime restrictions, or was it their patriotic duty to secure a profit? Should they use their advertising dollars to promote themselves or the nation and the war effort? How did businesses resolve these tensions between their own desires as capitalists and their acknowledgement of the war effort, between a wartime culture of savings, thrift, and austerity, and an entrenched culture of continuous production and consumption?

The answers to these problems proved surprisingly complex. The American fashion community in general, and the Los Angeles fashion community specifically, at times cooperated with and other times acted against the federal government as embodied by the War Production Board. “Dollar-a-year” men, including the chairman of the War Production Board Donald Marr Nelson and the first chief of the Textile Branch Robert R.

Guthrie, served the U.S. government directly, and businessmen affiliated with WPB Industrial Advisory Committees (IAC) came and went as needed. Indeed, both Nelson and Guthrie were men of the U.S. fashion industry before the war: Nelson worked as the president of Sears Roebuck and Guthrie owned and operated a department store in Paducah, Kentucky. These men and many others, in the words of historian James T. Sparrow in his *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government*, “volunteered to run the war effort at all levels,” and in doing so, they “sold the ‘Fifth Freedom’ of private enterprise as much as they did the other four.”¹⁸

Simultaneously, however, all the while presenting a cooperative face, individuals within the American fashion community rejected anti-inflation conservation campaigns by continuing to aggressively market their products using “patriotic” marketing strategies. Understanding how this system developed requires first and foremost an understanding of the works of historians Robert Westbrook, Lizabeth Cohen, and Charles McGovern. Westbrook argues in *Why We Fought: Forging American Obligation in World War II* that because citizenship in the United States remained “individualistic, voluntaristic, contractual, and instrumental,” political leaders needed to project the nation, and the people who cooperatively followed its mandates, as “the guarantor[s] of human rights or the protector[s] of an essentially private sphere.” Americans were thus encouraged in Norman Rockwell’s “Four Freedoms” to fight for their individual families by protecting them against fear or want, and later fulfill their personal obligations by

¹⁸ Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” from his 1941 State of the Union Address included freedom of speech and expression; freedom of worship; freedom from want; and freedom from fear. James Sparrow, *Warfare State: Americans and the Age of Big Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7.

means of active participation in the war effort. Westbrook further explains that by “working in defense plants, supporting the Red Cross, conserving vital materials, and buying war bonds,” citizens could “aid their soldier-protectors in the war for the family.”¹⁹

In many ways similar, Lizabeth Cohen’s *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* built upon the work of Westbrook by showing how political obligation could be expressed through restrained consumption. She argues that in the context of the Second World War, consumers transitioned from “purchaser consumers” to “citizen consumers” by following “new rituals of patriotic citizenship.”²⁰ Government officials within the Office of Price Administration and other agencies thus informed Americans that by being good consumers they could support the war, and even more so, bring a swift return to consumer plenty. “Suddenly tasks that had been viewed as private and domestic were brought into the civic arena and granted new political importance,” writes Cohen.²¹

¹⁹ Robert B. Westbrook, *Why We Fought: Forging American Obligations in World War II* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2004), 16-17.

²⁰ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 67. Her “citizen consumer” of the Progressive Era and the early years of the Great Depression believed himself to be “responsible for safeguarding the general good of the nation, in particular for prodding government to protect the rights, safety, and fair treatment of individual consumers in the private marketplace.” Such transitioned into the late Great Depression ideal of the “purchaser consumer” who understood that “consumers held the present health of the American capitalist economy in their hands, and that what mattered most was their aggregate purchasing power.” As the United States transitioned from depression to war, ideals of consumption again changed. Again, the government encouraged consumers to follow the “citizen consumer” idea and reorient their spending for the greater good (18 and 54).

²¹ Cohen, 67.

Charles McGovern in *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945*, finally, bridged the analysis of patriotic consumption and political obligation by explaining the response of business to government actions. He illuminates how wartime advertisements “cast corporations as the war heroes,” and the war itself as “a defense of free enterprise that also safeguarded the nation.” He thus demonstrates how admen explicitly co-opted established motifs of patriotism for the purpose of selling products. Apolitical consumer goods became connected to the ideals of democracy and spending became a ritual where individuals could claim their national identity. McGovern argues that while on the surface businesses appeared to encourage sacrifice, in actuality they “strenuously fought production limits and price ceilings, many of them arguing that the economy could support war production and expanded domestic production unrelated to defense.”²²

This dissertation builds upon the work of Westbrook, Cohen, and McGovern, and demonstrates how the Los Angeles fashion community simultaneously allowed for the conservation of materials through their adherence to L-85, and even more importantly, allowed female consumers to engage with and participate in communal performances of patriotism by means of continued shopping. Indeed, the fashion industry, like the American business community at large, was only too eager to provide the exact means to be “patriotic” with their garments. Individual consumers, at least according to the business community, could potentially satisfy their own private duty to the nation by engaging with patriotic chic, simplified fashion all the while satisfying themselves with

²²Charles McGovern, *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 350.

their purchase. The fashion industry thereby could serve the war effort all the while securing their own bottom lines.

Finally, this dissertation seeks answers to the age-old question: who could, and more importantly should, purchase what and for what purpose? Answering this question in reference to the fashion restrictions and fashion consumption all within the context of the Second World War will allow this dissertation to enter into the larger scholarly debate on the history of the consumer culture of the United States. Colin Campbell's "Consuming Goods and the Good of Consuming," for one, explains that since the American colonial period, there has been a general distrust of consumption in the United States. Explaining our "Puritan inheritance," he reveals how subsequent generations of Americans have repeatedly as a result felt it was best and proper to "place work above leisure, thrift above spending, and deferred above immediate gratification." The Puritans thus answered our basic question: no one should buy anything they did not absolutely need. Unnecessary consumption, in the opinion of the Puritans, was both superficial and frivolous.²³

T.H. Breen in his "Narrative of Consumer Life: Consumption, Ideology, and Community on the Eve of the American Revolution," moving chronologically, illuminates how, in the context of colonial United States, the answers changed. Do not buy British, the patriot colonist would have declared, instead buy American, and moreover, buy with self-restraint. Breen demonstrates that such a "bundle of popular

²³ Colin Campbell, "Consuming Goods and the Good of Consuming," in *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*, ed. Lawrence B. Glickman. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 119-120.

ideas and assumptions about commerce” eventually allowed the American colonist to “reimagine themselves within an independent commercial empire.” By participating in boycotts against British goods, and by instead purchasing and/or making American goods, the colonists acted politically and formed a collective identity. Moreover, by willingly choosing to participate, and by exercising self-restraint, consumers demonstrated public virtue. “What one did with one’s money mattered very much to the entire community,” writes Breen, “for in this highly charged atmosphere, economic self-indulgence became a glaring public vice.”²⁴

The question of the relative “morality of spending” was firmly taken up by Daniel Horowitz who published his book of that name, *The Morality of Spending: Attitudes Towards the Consumer Society in America, 1875-1940*. The author, more specifically, explored “several landmark household budget studies published between 1875 and the late 1930s” that collectively allowed middle-class investigators to determine (and later judge) how working- and lower middle class Americans spent their money. He explains, for example, how early-nineteenth century “conservative moralists” questioned the “self-indulgence of workers and immigrants and instead hoped people would seek to satisfy ‘higher’ wants, especially benevolence and culture.” He then describes how late nineteenth and early twentieth century social reformers, including Thorstein Veblen, who focused on the “persistent problem of the relation between affluence, morality, and the social order.” Veblen, for one, in the words of Horowitz, “launched a fundamental

²⁴ T.H. Breen, “Narrative of Consumer Life: Consumption, Ideology, and Community on the Eve of the American Revolution” in *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*, ed. Lawrence B. Glickman. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 110 and 119.

criticism of the habits of consumption of the wealthy,” and criticized what he perceived to be “conspicuous consumption.”²⁵

Other historians have demonstrated how marginalized groups within the United States have utilized consumer goods and their ability to work the power of the purse, to either agitate for social equality or become members of larger imagined communities. Andrew Heinze in his “From Scarcity to Abundance: The Immigrant as Consumer” details how eastern European Jews who immigrated to the United States between 1870 and 1914 viewed “items of consumption as foundation stones of American identity.” These individuals purchase American clothes, food, and furnishings for their home with, again in the words of Heinze, “the goal of fitting into American society.”²⁶ Cheryl Greenberg, likewise, demonstrates in “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” how Great Depression era African-Americans launched mass protests and boycotts with the goal of forcing private employers to hire members of their community in white-collar positions. These social justice campaigns politicized African-Americans who had previously not participated in political movements, and laid the foundation for subsequent civil rights movements.²⁷

David E. Shi in his sweeping narrative *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* cogently explains how Americans from colonial times to

²⁵ Daniel Horowitz, *The Morality of Spending: Attitudes Towards the Consumer Society in America, 1875-1940* (Baltimore and London): The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), xxix and 37.

²⁶ Andrew Heinze, “From Scarcity to Abundance: The Immigrant as Consumer,” in *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*, ed. Lawrence B. Glickman. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 190-197.

²⁷ Cheryl Greenberg, “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work,” in *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*, ed. Lawrence B. Glickman. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 241 and 267.

the Cold War participated in the “rich tradition of enlightened material restraint in the American experience” which has included “a hostility towards luxury and a suspicion of riches, a reverence for nature and a preference for rural over urban ways of life and work, a desire for personal self-reliance through frugality and diligence, a nostalgia for the past and a skepticism toward the claims of modernity, conscientious rather than conspicuous consumption, and an aesthetic taste for the plain and functional.” Sui chose not to extend his interpretations to the period of the Second World War; however, with regards to the Great Depression, he demonstrates how the economic crisis shook American’s confidence in their consumer culture. New Deal initiatives consequently, he explains, encouraged Americans, in the words of Roosevelt, to stop worshipping “power and wealth” and live in an “era of selfishness,” and instead celebrate “beauty and justice with lives of simplicity. The Civilian Conservation Corps thus attempted to instill in urban youth an appreciation the hard life of the rural farmer²⁸.

Given the predominance of such an entrenched rhetoric of simplicity and frugality, how could the fashion industry, an industry founded upon the principle of planned obsolescence; thrive within the context of war? Such rhetoric was, in many ways, ignored by the fashion industry with the coming of the economic powerhouse that was mass-consumed, mass-produced fashion. Regardless, even peacetime social critics continued to attack what was perceived to be the excesses of fashion specifically and consumption more broadly. Returning to Thorstein Veblen, he in his *The Theory of the*

²⁸ David E. Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3 and 233-234.

Leisure Class (1899) postulated that the “laws of conspicuous waste guides consumption in apparel.” He explained, more specifically, how the beauty of a piece of fashion was “somewhat in proportion” to its expense; and how women’s fashion in particular, such as in the case of the corset or the high heel, visually announced that the wearer was “permanently and obviously unfit for work.”²⁹ Much later, social critique Lewis Mumford’s *Faith for Living* (1940) encouraged Americans only strive for “everything essential in life, but nothing beyond that that; nothing for sale, for show, for imitative expenditure of the class above.”³⁰

With the coming of war, claims about the relative merits of simplicity and frugality only gained credence over the culture of fashion and fashion consumption. Soon after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt himself encouraged sacrifice in a fireside chat to the nation, although he stressed that patriotic Americans would not consider such sacrifices hardships. “Ahead there lies sacrifices for all of us,” he declared, “but it is not correct to use that word.” He continued,

The United States does not consider it a sacrifice to do all one can, to give one’s best to our Nation, when the Nation is fighting for its existence and future life. It is not sacrifice for any man, old or young, to be in the Army or Navy of the United States. Rather it is a privilege...It is not a sacrifice to do without many things which we are accustomed if the national defense calls for doing without.

Roosevelt further asserted that the American people would “cheerfully give up those material things that they are asked to give up.”³¹ Concretely, this emerged as Office of

²⁹ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, accessed December 8, 1012, Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/>

³⁰ Sui, 40.

³¹ Fireside Chat (December 9, 1941) The American Presidency Project Online, accessed October 7, 2012, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>.

War Information campaigns urging Americans to “use it up, wear it out, make it do,” and consumer activists stressing that “every purchase made” was a “claim on our nation’s resources.” (Figure 5)³²

Could the nation morally consume fashion, given its excesses, while fellow citizens died on the battlefield? Could the nation recklessly utilize scarce resources that were needed for serious purposes? Even more specifically, could scarce resources be utilized in the production of frivolous fashion for women, such as California sportswear, instead of the serious clothing of uniforms for the masculine pursuit of war? Could, and more importantly should, newly enriched members of the working class, both male and female, flush with wartime wages be able to participate as actively in the fashion world, as much as their wealthier counterparts? Finally, should people of color be able to gain access to and satisfaction from scarce raw materials in the form of fashionable dress, and would this call into question the proper place of these people and allow them to act other than humble or submissive?

³² University of North Texas Digital Library, accessed May 17, 2012, <http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc193/>



Figure 5
“Use it Up, Wear it Out, Make it Do,” Office of War Information, 1943

Despite the rhetoric, given the previously described understanding that fashion and fashion production was crucial to the economic health of both the nation broadly, and the cities of Los Angeles and New York specifically, and because of the entrenched social culture of continual production and consumption leading people to want (or perhaps even need) fashion for the sake of morale, the fashion industry was maintained in the altered manner as put forth in this dissertation, complete with the patriotic marketing strategies detailed above. Indeed, the federal government repeatedly declared that they had no desire to destroy fashion as an industry. Interestingly, however, as previously described, the WPB through L-85 only restricted the industrial production of fashion. Nothing except gentle persuasions to “use it up, wear it out, make it do,” strategies which did build upon established rhetoric of frugality, would be directed at consumers themselves who could, in theory, continue to purchase as much as they could afford. Just at the moment when the federal government could have really put an end to the practices that revolved around wastefulness, especially in the context of total war, they held back. One important question remains: why? Instead of pressing forward an aggressive program of sacrifice and frugality, the WPB perhaps decided that morale was more important than conservation, and that in a democracy, citizens needed to decide for themselves how they would respond to the national emergency. In doing so, perhaps they would become civically engaged, and use their fashion choices to express their social and political obligations to the nation. Either that or the very prospect of initiating nationwide clothing rationing proved daunting, if not prohibitive.

This dissertation, in many ways, can be considered a business history, one of which illuminates how the business community developed a close and cooperative relationship with government in the midst of the Second World War. The nature of the sources discovered indeed mandate this. Determining exactly what people thought, and why they thought it, remains difficult. Much can be said, regardless, through a close analysis of business sources and products including trade journals, advertisements, publicity materials, and motion pictures.

To provide necessary background information to ground this dissertation, Chapter One details the WPB's conceptualization of L-85 and the process that they took to write it. It illuminates how the WPB worked with the fashion community, as represented by the "Industry Advisory Committees," in an unprecedented move of cooperation, to draft the order in a way that allowed for the continuation of restricted, unregimented fashion, or in other words, war appropriate fashion. To do so, L-85 first simplified clothing by means of design restrictions, leading to the creation of streamlined fashion and ensuring the production of the maximum number of units. Secondly, through its exclusions, it allowed the WPB and therefore by extension the federal government and its citizens, to demonstrate their enduring collective core values. Even in times of war, certain social roles (i.e. motherhood) demanded special accommodations; certain social rituals (i.e. marriage) demanded celebration; certain social institutions (i.e. the church and its clergy) demanded respect; and certain social realities (i.e. death) demanded reverence.

Chapter Two heads westward, demonstrating how the fashion community of Los Angeles responded to actions taken in Washington, DC. More specifically, after explaining the position of California fashion before Pearl Harbor, it details how Los Angeles based sportswear designers responded to the new fashion environment created by the war and L-85 by exploring the public statements and marketing strategies of Southland fashion organizations, namely the Associated Apparel Manufacturers of Los Angeles (AAMLA) through the trade journal *California Stylist* and individual designers in their advertisements and public statements.³³ Again this shifts the focus of scholarship west, and moreover, given the dissimilarities between the New York and California fashion industries in terms of origins, business practices, and products produced, and given the dissimilarities in terms of wartime experiences, this dissertation will illuminate an alternative response to war conditions that were uniquely Californian.

Chapter three then details how similar strategies were utilized by the film studios of Hollywood, specifically by famous, influential costume designers and savvy fashion “exploitation” professionals. While they studios did continued during the war to use their motion pictures to first disperse fashion trends and then sell them, they added to this in the context of war by re-creating themselves into a source of fashion propaganda. They thus educated women on proper home-front shopping and styling practices by presenting the leading ladies in war-infused, war-inspired costume, satisfying the demands of the federal government who understood the power of Hollywood. The patriotic female centered wartime drama, moreover, in the hands of capable studio executives, had

³³ Southland, meaning the area of Southern California.

become the best and most profitable way to market the “patriotic” creations of the costume designers.³⁴

Finally, chapter four deals with the consequences of L-85 as written. Encouraged by aggressive fashion advertising campaigns described in chapters two and three, and ignoring counter government propaganda campaigns to “use it up, wear it out, make it do,” consumers purchased fashion at record levels because while L-85 did restrict fashion design, it did not restrict fashion designers from selling, and fashion consumers from purchasing, as much as they possibly could.³⁵ Curiously, instead of directly dealing with this clear case of consumer push back, even in the wake of buying rushes and clothing hoarding in Los Angeles and elsewhere in response to the beginning of shoe rationing, the federal government only resorted to strengthening L-85 and asking the fashion community to tone down their advertisements. Chapter four additionally explores the zoot suit phenomenon in Los Angeles, revealing that the WPB disproportionately targeted zoot fashion as a particularly blatant example of WPB non-compliance, likely because it was perceived to be so very unapologetic. Even more so, they targeted the wearer of zoot fashion, questioning individual consumers’ patriotism, and inadvertently exacerbating war-created racial tensions and contributing to racial conflict in the form of the Zoot Suit Riots. In doing so, this dissertation is able to consider how a small number

³⁴ This dissertation uses the phrase “female centered wartime drama” to refer to films that focused on women’s issues that came up during the war, or in other words, motion pictures that focused on female industrial employment, female military service, or life on the homefront without men.

³⁵ Lee A. Craig, “Consumption Expenditures, by type, 1929-1999”, Table Cd 153-263 in *Historical Statistics of the United States, Earliest Times to the Present: Millennial Edition*, edited by Susan B. Carter, Scott Sigmund Gartner, Michael R. Haines, Alan L. Olmstead, Richard Sutch, and Gavin Wright, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

of consumers responded to this new fashion environment, something which cannot be done elsewhere due to a lack of sources.

Chapter 1:

“Ration-al” Fashion, Unregimented: L-85 and Patriotic Fashion

The April 1942 edition of *Vogue*, the preeminent American fashion magazine, included an image on an editorial page of a woman in fashionable clothing on the steps of the U.S. Capitol Building. The woman, wearing a dress with three-quarter length sleeves and an “A” line skirt, stands with her back to the camera, her hands behind her clutching a purse. Seemingly, her gaze is captured by the statue of Armed Freedom located at the apex of the dome. Fashion itself, as embodied by the woman focusing her absolute attention on the seat of government, the source of power, and the symbols of the nation’s democracy, symbolically defers authority to the officials within. Posed as if to suggest both awe and loyalty, the woman demonstrates how she, and therefore fashion, had accepted restrictions with grace and respect for the national emergency (Figure 6).

In an associated selection of text, the editors explained why the image was included on the pages of a fashion magazine. They informed readers that many “rules and laws” of a new war-imposed “rational life” would soon be coming from Washington, D.C. They coined the word “ration-al” in order to highlight two separate but related words, ration and rational, and to suggest that in wartime, rationing was in fact rational: the “necessary, patriotic, and reasonable” solution to a difficult problem. In the case of fashion, they moreover asserted that accepting rationing, or specifically clothing design

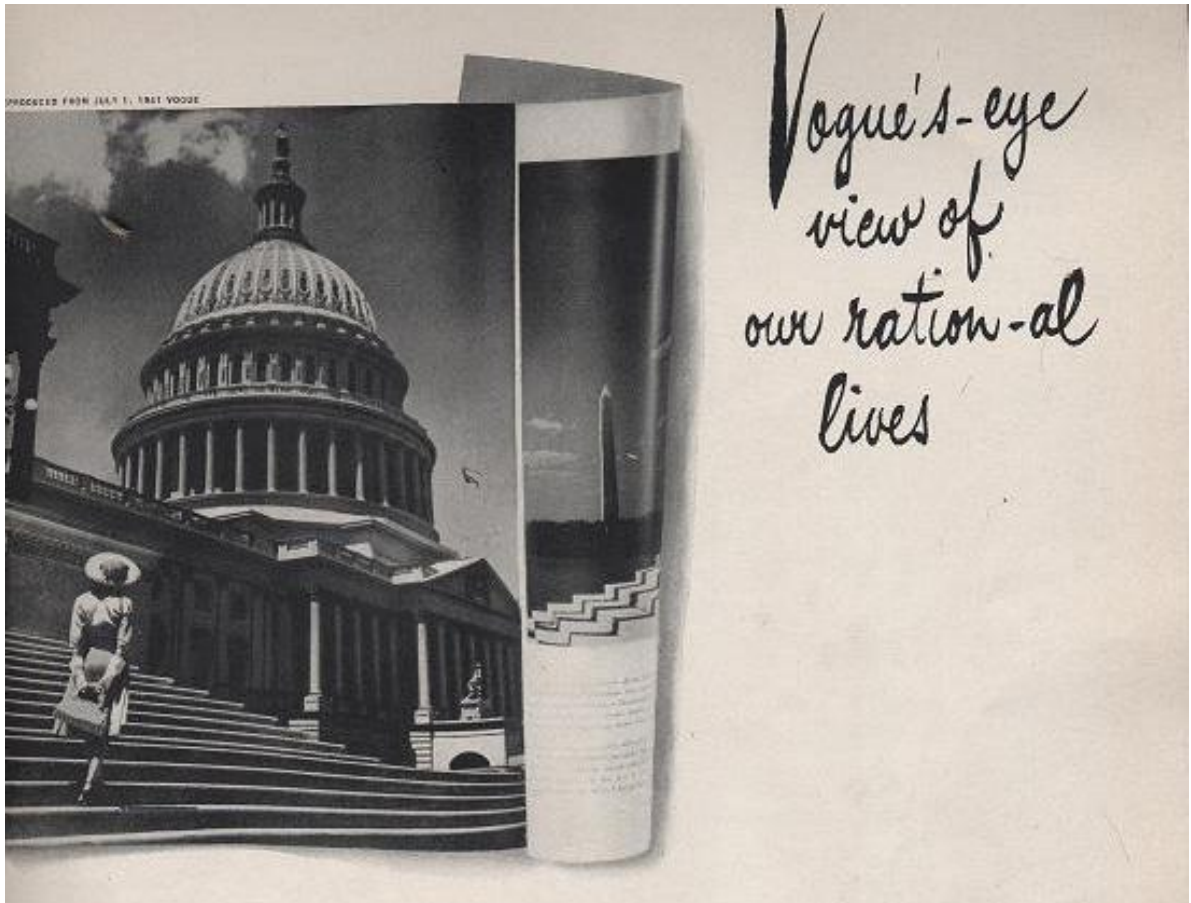


Figure 6
"Vogue's-Eye View of Our Ration-al Lives," 1942

restrictions, would be “pleasant” because the federal government was allowing fashion designers to continue what made fashion “pleasant” to begin with: “attractiveness, becomingness, [and] imagination.”¹ To demonstrate this, the magazine asserted that women simply needed to turn the page. They would then view, for example, a “rational and beautiful” dress made of “undyed shantung”: undyed in order to preserve resources for military use, simple in style in order to conserve fabric (Figure 7).²

To encourage the national acceptance of wartime clothing limitations, the War Production Board had requested the help of the fashion press, suggesting that they present “ration-al” dress as fashionable in editorial photography and sing the praises of restrictions in the written content of their magazines.³ The image of the woman on the steps of the Capitol Building, and the complementary editorial and fashion photographs in the magazine, exemplify how *Vogue* responded to this call. Moreover, given the status of *Vogue*, this response served as a bellweather for how the rest of the industry would also react to the coming of L-85.

The editorial demonstrates, moreover, the extent to which the U.S. government seemingly managed to bring the fashion industry into a cooperative relationship. This had not been an easy task. General Limitation Order L-85, the source of the restrictions in

¹ It is important to understand that while *Vogue* used the term “rationing” to describe clothing design restrictions, the WPB did not. The WPB used the term to describe the practice of restricting the quantities of a commodity or resource that an individual consumer could purchase.

² “Vogue’s Eye View of our Ration-al Lives,” *Vogue*, April 1942. “Shantung” is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as a “soft undressed Chinese silk.” Oxford English Dictionary, accessed December 8, 2012, www.oed.com. For a discussion on *Vogue* magazine’s coverage of California fashion in the 1930s, see Daniel Delis Hill, *As Seen in Vogue: A Century of American Fashion in Advertising* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2004), 53-56.

³ “Control Without Regimentation: The New L-85” (Washington, DC: War Production Board Division of Information, 1943), 48-50.



RATIONAL AND BEAUTIFUL...UNDYED SHANTUNG

Figure 7
“Rational and Beautiful, Undyed Shantung,” 1942.

question, came at a time when both the fashion consumer and the fashion industry wanted to spread their wings. War mobilization meant wages for American workers and a long desired increase in disposable income. Many wanted to spend their newly earned cash to treat themselves, and consumers surged into the marketplace to satisfy their pent-up demands long ignored during the Great Depression, from a national aggregate of \$5.9 billion in 1939 to \$7.1 billion in 1941.⁴ Simultaneously, the influx of capital caused by the increase in shopping promised staggering profits for business. Retailers and manufacturers, understandably, were eager to sell. Moreover, larger trends within the fashion industry had begun to shift. The Nazi occupation of Paris had disrupted that city's hold on the international fashion market, and as consequence, American designers in both New York and California wanted to take the opportunity to increase the worldwide reputation of American created style. Indeed, California and New York both saw fashion as an economic opportunity for their city, one that needed to be capitalized on. These two states thus waged the "stylish battle" for wartime and postwar fashion status.⁵

The federal government through the WPB, however, declared that scarce raw materials, for the duration of the war, be directed towards the production of a "great

⁴ Lee A. Craig, "Consumption Expenditures, by type, 1929-1999", Table Cd 153-263 in *Historical Statistics of the United States, Earliest Times to the Present: Millennial Edition*, edited by Susan B. Carter, Scott Sigmund Gartner, Michael R. Haines, Alan L. Olmstead, Richard Sutch, and Gavin Wright, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

⁵ Edgar W. Nassauer, "California Clothes," *Wall Street Journal*, July 6, 1944.

arsenal of democracy,” as the President put it in a Fireside Chat of December 29, 1940.⁶ They believed that unrestrained free enterprise and the uncontrolled consumption of resources by civilians were incompatible with all-out mobilization. Rampant production of consumer goods could only disrupt the war effort, while rapid mobilization remained crucial to the war effort. Fashion and the fashion industry, like the rest of the nation, they demanded, needed to respect the imperatives of war.

At the same time, the WPB understood that civilian clothing manufacturing needed to be continued. In order to protect the long-term health of the economy, to maintain civilian morale, and to demonstrate their continued belief in the American system of free enterprise, fashion and style were allowed to continue for the duration. L-85 was orchestrated in order to resolve these contradictory needs—to pay respect to the national emergency and protect the military’s access to raw materials on one hand, and to maintain the fashion industry and civilian morale on the other. It officially mandated wartime fashionable simplicity and restraint. Through L-85, an industry once famous for pioneering the system of planned obsolescence would be transformed into something which could continue without alienating or offending U.S. wartime sensibilities and needs. Emerging broadly from agency wide policy, and worked out specifically with the help of the fashion industry, the WPB placed its indelible mark on American fashion, and, as will be demonstrated here, they left their mark on the fashion culture of the city of Los Angeles.

⁶ “Fireside Chat” (December 29, 1940), The American Presidency Project Online, accessed April 28, 2010, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>

With the backing of the fashion industry through the Industry Advisory Committees (IACs), the WPB effectively created a new fashion environment where manufactures and designers created, advertisers sold, and consumers consumed streamlined, “unregimented,” yet interesting and workable garments. L-85 emerged as an embodiment of the newly developed home-front ethos of sacrifice, as well as the U.S. war mobilization plan, an example of how business and the government came together for the sake of the war effort.

By forging this cooperative relationship, the WPB mobilized the fashion industry, and by extension fashion designers, to serve the war effort. Because they first made the industry a participant in the planning process, instead of simply surprising them with unexpected orders, and then placed the success or failure of the resulting order, and by extension the war itself, at the feet of fashion, the WPB moreover made compliance a moral obligation. Unless the fashion industry managed to design innovative garments that could excite consumers to the appropriate level, the WPB implied, they would be hurting the entire nation.

Resulting garments simultaneously would ensure the satisfaction of consumer demand and pacified worries about conspicuous consumption, all the while ensuring the proper prosecution of the war. L-85, moreover, was a true representation of the nation itself in times of war. Through its inclusions and exclusions, it mandated changes for the sake for the war effort, while preserving what the nation was fighting for in the first place.

Even more so, regardless of the fact that L-85 in theory did not attempt to alter consumer behavior and instead mandated changes in the industrial production of clothing, the government order in practice served to link fashion with a powerful rhetoric of civic engagement. When a housewife happily wore an L-85 compliant dress, or when she sent her child around her neighborhood in search of scrap metal, she performed her private duty to the nation. L-85 and other limitation orders were thus the means used by the federal government to help consumers first articulate, and later demonstrate, their own fulfillment of their obligations to the war effort.⁷

**“The Great Arsenal of Democracy”:
War Mobilization and Civilian Needs**

There are a good many ways we can lose this war, but there is only one way to win it: Every man of us must keep his sleeves rolled up all the time. Every machine must work all the way around the clock. We have come to the place where every hour is zero hour, where a day lost can mean a month of fighting later on. Let us not waste a day or minute. Let us use every man and every machine. Let's use them now!⁸

Donald Marr Nelson, the first chairman of the War Production Board, noted the above in 1942. The United States government, under the leadership of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, believed that victory could only be assured if the United States outproduced its rivals.⁹ The President insisted upon this in his first wartime State

⁷ Robert Westbrook's arguments concerning political obligation greatly influenced this line of argument. The evidence firmly suggests that his larger arguments concerning the demonstration of obligation can and should be applied to the specific case of fashion. Westbrook, 16-17.

⁸ *Production Goes to War* (Washington, DC: War Production Board Division of Information, 1942), 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

of the Union address on January 6, 1942. “The superiority of the United Nations in munitions and ships,” he declared, “must be overwhelming—so overwhelming that the Axis Nations can never hope to catch up with it.”¹⁰ Ten days later, Roosevelt established the War Production Board (WPB) by Executive Order 9024 for the “purpose of assuring the most effective prosecution of war procurement and production.”¹¹

Long before their official entrance into the conflict, the United States began producing munitions for England and France as early as 1938 in response to Hitler’s provocations. Production sped up further after Roosevelt declared a national emergency on May 25, 1940 in the wake of the German invasion of western Europe.¹² By making such a declaration, Roosevelt initiated the steps needed to create an “office of emergency management,” which he eventually did by reestablishing the National Defense Advisory Commission (NDAC), the World War I agency, on May 29.¹³ The NDAC facilitated the

¹⁰ “Franklin Roosevelt, State of the Union Address,” (1942), The American Presidency Project Online, accessed April 28, 2010, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>.

¹¹ “Executive Order 9024,” The American Presidency Project Online, accessed April 28, 2010, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>. For more information on why Roosevelt created the WPB as he did see: Matthew J. Dickinson, *Bitter Harvest: FDR, Presidential Power, and the Growth of the Presidential Branch* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For an account of the founding of the WPB see: Donald Marr Nelson, *Arsenal of Democracy: The Story of American War Production* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1946). For a history of the WPB see: Paul A.C. Koinstein, *Arsenal of World War II: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1940-1945* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

¹² Dickinson, 120. Dickinson explains that this declaration of emergency was the second that Roosevelt made. The first, a declaration of a “limited emergency,” occurred in September 1939.

¹³ In Executive Order 8248 of September 8, 1939 Roosevelt gave himself the power to create an “office of emergency management” in cases of “national emergency.” *Ibid.*, 119-120.

production of munitions by first estimating the military needs, and then drafting policies to satisfy those needs.¹⁴

Given that Roosevelt did not give the NDAC much power, the commission proved susceptible to being controlled by both the military and industry, and lacked the authority to get anything accomplished.¹⁵ Many leading Congressional Republicans and their friends in the military believed that the military itself could direct preliminary mobilization through the Army-Navy Munitions Board (ANMB). Industry, for its part, agreed: they dragged their collective feet, and fought to maintain a single-minded focus on civilian production. They felt that it was unwise to dramatically increase war-related production while the situation in Europe was so uncertain. Furthermore, many believed if the ever-expanding civilian market at home promised limitless profits, dealing with the government only promised the red tape of bureaucracy.¹⁶

Such was the case because as the United States worked to become that “arsenal of democracy,” they pumped billions of dollars into the depressed economy. This increased government spending would eventually result in a much-needed Keynesian boost. Increased government expenditures on war material at the onset of war meant jobs: jobs that would soon create expendable income and demand for consumer products. Such

¹⁴ The NDAC consisted of seven divisions: Consumer Protection, Employment, Farm Products, Industrial Materials, Industrial Production, Price Stabilization, and Transportation. For an overview of the activities of these divisions, please see Koinstein, 18-28. Koinstein argues that the President created the NDAC as a “loosely structure, ill-defined, and largely powerless” agency as a “convenient means of initiating economic preparedness.” Roosevelt could continue to explore other mobilization methods and leadership styles. Moreover, as everything remained imprecise, he could easily change things if he wanted to.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 67-69

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

jobs beget more jobs for an increase in consumer demand encouraged industry to speed up their operations. More and more American thus found employment, and therefore consumer demand continued to increase. Industry thus perceived the coming of war as a great opportunity, and resented the NDAC attempts to rein them in.¹⁷ Connected to the ideal of personal liberty, American business tended to view their economic freedom, or their ability to work for personal gain, as something that needed to be protected, or at least something that should only be circumvented when absolutely necessary. While perhaps inconvenient to the goals of war mobilizations, this belief held credence in the minds of those in government. Essentially, in the minds of many, laissez-faire capitalism was the American way of doing things.¹⁸

Regardless, given the imperatives of the impending crisis, Roosevelt needed to do something to force change. In January 1941, he worked with key military officials in establishing the Office of Production Management (OPM), which replaced the NDAC. In creating the OPM, the President managed to bring some measure of centralized organization to the task of war preparation. By Executive Order 8629, Roosevelt granted the OPM with the power to “formulate plans for the mobilization for defense of the production facilities of the nation, and to take all lawful action necessary to carry out such plans.”¹⁹ The OPM began utilizing a system of letter named orders. “P”

¹⁷ Ibid., 504.

¹⁸ Cohen, 64.

¹⁹ *Industrial Mobilization for War: History of the War Production Board and Predecessor Agencies, 1940-1945, Volume 1: Program and Administration* (Washington, DC: Civilian Production Administration, 1947), 95 For text of the Executive Order see: “Executive Order 8629,” The American Presidency Project Online, accessed April 28, 2010, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>. Roosevelt divided the OPM into three

(preference) orders gave priority to military contracts, ensuring their completion; “M” (material or conservation) orders restricted or outright forbade the civilian use of scarce raw materials like rubber or cotton. “E” (equipment) orders restricted the non-military use of industrial equipment; “L” (limitation) orders placed restraints on the production of consumer non-durables so the maximum number of goods could be produced efficiently out of a limited stock of raw materials. Collectively, these orders allowed the OPM to press for mobilization while still allowing for the maintenance of the civilian economy. “P,” “E”, and “M” orders ensured the satisfaction of military needs; “L” orders limited civilian production.

With time it became clear that the OPM still helped to bring the military and industry closer together at the expense of effective war mobilization. Both continued to show that they opposed rapid war mobilization efforts, and that they had the ability to stop it.²⁰ In order to circumvent these stalling tactics, in August 1941, Roosevelt placed the OPM under the control of the Supply, Priorities, and Allocations Board (SPAB), and placed issues of civilian supply under the jurisdiction of the OPM.²¹ Roosevelt then charged the SPAB with determining civilian and military requirements, and securing the necessary raw materials for production of both.²² SPAB thus became the first agency to

divisions: Priorities, Production, and Purchases. For an overview of the activities of these divisions, please see Koinstein, 75-86. Koinstein argues that the OPM was a “pared-down version of NDAC, one that was focused on defense output.” (79)

²⁰ Ibid., 75.

²¹ Ibid., 91.

²² Ibid., 182.

consider essential civilian requirements that needed to be maintained for the health of civilians and the civilian economy.

Regardless of the fact that the SPAB must be considered more powerful than any agency that preceded it, Roosevelt desired still to create a centralized agency with the power to push for all-out mobilization. The opportunity to create such an agency came in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor as the political opposition that had plagued Roosevelt's earlier efforts was greatly diminished. In his 1942 State of the Union address, Roosevelt detailed his ambitious production goals to a receptive Congress: 60,000 airplanes in 1942 (125,000 in 1943), 45,000 tanks in 1942 (75,000 in 1943), 20,000 anti-aircraft guns in 1942 (35,000 in 1943), and 6,000,000 tons of shipping in 1942 (10,000,000 in 1943). In order to meet these goals, Roosevelt tried to create an organization with teeth in the form of the WPB.²³

Returning to Executive Order 9024 of January 16, 1942, Roosevelt instilled in the Chairman of the War Production Board, Donald Marr Nelson, the authority to "exercise general direction over the war procurement and production program," and to "determine the policies, plans, procedures, and methods...including purchasing, contracting, specifications, and construction; and including conversion, requisitioning, plant expansion, and the financing thereof."²⁴ More specifically, the Division of Industry Operations, one of six divisions within the WPB, worked to direct the flow of raw

²³ Dickinson, 142.

²⁴ "Executive Order 9024," The American Presidency Project Online, accessed April 28, 2010, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>.

materials into the production of war material by means of converting civilian industries.²⁵ Twenty-four separate industry branches, one of which was the Textile Branch, each worked within specific industry sectors.²⁶ To encourage conversion, they offered generous cost-plus terms that removed risk. Uncle Sam financed capital improvements; war contracts guaranteed profits. To force conversion, they restricted the civilian use of scarce raw materials, skilled labor, and important machinery through their passage of “E,” “L,” “M,” and “P” orders, the system inherited from the OPM. They understood that without limitations, civilian and war industries would compete for access to these resources, and that competition would drive up prices. This, of course, would be damaging to the goals of U.S. war mobilization.²⁷ Inherent in these policies was the old belief that the United States could not support a robust, uncontrolled civilian economy while pressing for all-out mobilization. Limitations and restrictions needed to be placed in order to bring industry under the control of government. Regardless, as noted above, given that “L” orders only restricted production, the civilian economy was allowed to operate in a restricted form (Figure 8)

²⁵ Nelson divided the work of the WPB into six divisions: Purchases, Production, Materials, Labor, Civilian Supply, and Industrial Operations. For an overview of the divisions, see *Industrial Mobilization for War: History of the War Production Board and Predecessor Agencies, 1940-1945, Volume 1: Program and Administration* (Washington, DC: Civilian Production Administration, 1947), 240-248.

²⁶ *Industrial Mobilization for War*, 244

²⁷ Weiner, Joseph L, “Legal and Economic Programs of Civilian Supply,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 9 (1942): 122-149.



Figure 8
"Good News from Home, More Production," 1942

“Special Desirability”: American (New York) Fashion

With regards to the fashion industry, the WPB faced an uphill battle given well-established practices within the U.S. fashion industry coupled with exciting wartime innovations. Technological innovations and the discovery of new energy sources led to a dramatic increase in industrial output in the United States in the 1880s. Spurred by the invention of the sewing machine, large amounts of inexpensive, mass-produced ready-to-wear fashion entered the market from factories mainly located in New York City.²⁸ As production continued to increase, and greater economies of scale were achieved, manufacturers began to fear that they could produce more than the nation could buy. Something needed to be done in order to increase demand. By the turn of the twentieth-century, the solution to this problem presented itself to the fashion industry, which in turn, pioneered a system of consumption that could be easily taken up by other industries dependent on sales. In the words of *Dry Goods Economist* in 1903: “The way out of overproduction must lie in finding out what the woman at the counter is going to want; make it; then promptly drop it and go onto something else to which fickle fashion is turning her attention.”²⁹ Modern mass-produced, mass-consumed fashion, therefore, became organized according to, and certainly became dependent on, the premise of planned obsolescence: the assumption that the industry could convince consumers to reject

²⁸ For a history of the American ready-to-wear fashion industry, see Nancy L. Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work: A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997)

²⁹ William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993),94.

perfectly serviceable products in order to reenter the market for a second purchase. Manufactures began continually changing styles on a seasonal basis and did so with aggressive advertising campaigns that implied what was only recently new had become passé. Fashionability, one retailer noted in 1908, brought to simple clothing “a value over and above its intrinsic worth” and instilled “special desirability” onto that which otherwise would only could entice “languid interest.”³⁰

To further entice demand, the American fashion industry presented the American middle class consumer with Parisian style (Figure 9).³¹ Department store owners and clothing manufactures within the city took biyearly trips to Europe in order to purchase the right to copy designs. For a fee, or in industry terms a “caution,” buyers purchased a muslin toile and manufacturing instructions that could be taken by American fashion designers and simplified for mass production. This system allowed the American, New York based fashion industry to assert that the garments created in the United States for ready-to-wear followed European couture trends, which infused the machine-made garments with an added sense of luxury and glamour.³² This system, moreover, meant that American fashion designers lacked the ability to design for themselves. They received, consequently, no credit for the work they did and thus labored without

³⁰ Ibid.,91.

³¹ As cited by Buckland, 82.

³² Arnold, 76.

B. ALTMAN & CO.

Admission by street
from 1000 to 1500
at 1000 a year
1500



Midway the hem
slightly gathered
and in case
both, making
10.00



the puff
and the
and
10.00



Substance a
and
and
10.00



Our Paris copies
are ready now...



Figure 9
Advertisement for B. Altman and Co., 1940.

recognition in their own name.³³ By 1939, however, New York City produced over \$1 billion worth of women's apparel.³⁴

This production system functioned nicely until the onset of Great Depression. Rebecca Arnold's *The American Look: Fashion, Sportswear and the Image of Women in the 1930s and 1940s New York* demonstrates that in response to discouraging sales figures, the U.S. fashion industry finally began to recognize, in her words, that "if American was to survive the Depression, then it needed to develop its own sense of identity." Consequently, she argues, designers and manufactures based in New York began to develop a "distinctively American approach to fashion" with an innovative aesthetic of simplicity in the form of American sportswear in order to further stimulate demand for U.S. made products.³⁵

The German occupations of France at the beginning of the Second World War in Europe further disrupted the established fashion system. Sandra Stansbery Buckland suggests in her "Promoting American Fashion, 1940-1944: Building Our Own House" that the removal of Paris as the international worldwide fashion capital left a void. "The unprecedented opportunity presented by the Second World War," she argues, "prompted the American fashion industry to revolutionize its business practices and launch its own campaign for design leadership."³⁶ American designers for the first time were

³³ Buckland, *Promoting*, 100

³⁴ "Apparel Manufacturing in California" (Sacramento: State Reconstruction and Reemployment Commission, January 1945), 18.

³⁵ Arnold, 79.

³⁶ Buckland, *Promoting*, 80.

mentioned in American newspapers and magazines by name, signifying that they would be taken seriously for their own designs. Again in the words of Buckland, “suddenly fashion ads carried messages with a decidedly American flavor.” She cites, for example, how Lord and Taylor presented, according to one advertisement, “play clothes by Brigance, Lord & Taylor’s own gifted young designer who sets the sports clothes trends for America.”³⁷

“Properly Dressed”: Circumscribed Fashion for the Duration

We are at the stage where what we have must be made to go as far as possible in making as many units to keep people properly dressed as possible. When I say “properly dressed,” I am speaking in the terms of keeping them adequately clothed from the standpoint of warmth, and of course, coolness.³⁸

H. Stanley Marcus spoke these words to the members of the fashion industry who came to Washington, D.C., at the request of the War Production Board to discuss an impending clothing limitation order with the Textile, Clothing, and Leather Goods Branch (a.k.a. the “Textile Branch): what was destined to become General Limitation Order L-85. Marcus, a consultant to the Textile Branch and heir to the Neiman Marcus department store, and the rest of the WPB hierarchy believed that involving the fashion industry would encourage their later cooperation and support. They understood that the future success of the limitation order depended on this.

³⁷Ibid, 81 and 83.

³⁸ “Verbatim Proceedings: Informal Conference of Women’s Dress Industry, 19 February 1942,” 4. National Archives Record Group 79, Select Document File, Box 782.

As the Textile Branch worked with the fashion industry, they found themselves plagued by the same issues that were also faced by the entire WPB: how to ensure the satisfaction of civilian and military needs? Written in more specific words: how could the government restrict the fashion industry to ensure the production of military needs (i.e. uniforms, sheets, etc) while still ensuring the fulfillment of civilian clothing needs and the maintenance of clothing manufacturing? Even more importantly, how could they convince the fashion industry to accept restrictions given a history of planned obsolescence in the fashion industry and the perceived opportunities found in the occupation of Paris?

To solve their particular issues, following the pattern set by the larger WPB, the Textile Branch reconfigured the fashion industry for the duration. They informed the representatives gathered that business as usual could not continue; they informed that fashion would become, so to speak, a “mechanism of war”: it would become part of the U.S. war mobilization plan, and that fashion designers themselves would serve a role in the war effort.

The Textile Branch faced an uphill battle in the late winter and early spring of 1942 as they tried to convince the fashion industry about the necessity of restrictions. One retailer, Marcus recalled much later, requested a private meeting during the planning process in which he remarked: “Why are you going through this silly conservation rigmarole? There’s not going to be any shortages.”³⁹ Many manufacturers and retailers feared that the federal government was needlessly crippling an important segment of the

³⁹ H. Stanley Marcus, *Minding the Store: A Memoir* (Boston: Little Brown, 1974), 113.

civilian economy. They questioned the right of the WPB to force restrictions, especially in the face of ongoing concerns about the fate of the economy in the immediate aftermath of the Great Depression and because the industry was in a unique position because of the previously described loss of Paris as the international design center. Historian Charles McGovern's *Sold American* informs us, moreover, that during the years of the Second World War, many businesses chose to connect their brands, products, or services with political ideals. "The war," he argues, "made the preservation of goods and rituals of consumption – and the businesses that made them possible – all the more critical because they symbolized the nation and its institutions."⁴⁰ By questioning restrictions, the fashion community was still holding onto the idea that free enterprise was the American way of doing things.

The same tensions reverberated throughout society at large. Wartime publicity by the U.S. government engaged this forthrightly, and launched campaigns against excess spending, fearing the dangerous consequences of wartime inflation. Through the direction of the Office of War Information, citizens were encouraged to conserve and save, instead of waste and spend: to "use it up, wear it out, make it do." And above that, to buy as many war bonds and stamps as possible (Figure 10).⁴¹

⁴⁰ McGovern, 339.

⁴¹ Richard L. Lingerman, *Don't You Know There is A War On? The American Home-front 1941-1945* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1970), 234-235. More examples of anti-inflation and conservation campaign posters can be viewed on the Ad Access, a website created by Duke University Libraries. Ad Access, Duke University Libraries, accessed February 6, 2012, <http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess/>

How to prevent inflation in one easy lesson



Put that money back in your pocket!

When a lot of people want the same thing, its price goes up.

Americans have more money today—much more—than there are things to buy with it.

So every big or little thing you buy—that you can possibly do without—cuts supplies and bids prices up on what is left.

Rising prices spell inflation. And every inflation has been followed by a cruel and bitter depression . . . men out of work, homes lost, families suffering.

We don't want inflation: we don't want another depression.

A United States War message prepared by the War Advertising Council, approved by the Office of War Information, and contributed by this magazine in cooperation with the Magazine Publishers of America.

4 THINGS TO DO to keep prices down and help avoid another depression

1. Don't buy a thing you can do without.
2. Never pay more than the ceiling price. Always give stamps for rationed goods.
3. Don't take advantage of war conditions to fight for more money for yourself or goods you sell.
4. Save. Buy and hold all the War Bonds you can afford—to help pay for the war and insure your future. Keep up your insurance.

**HELP
US
KEEP**

PRICES DOWN

Figure 10
War Advertising Council Anti-Inflation Poster, 1944

Regardless of this, the WPB pressed forward because they firmly believed they had no other choice. On March 9, 1942 they announced that they would “more or less freeze the existing silhouette” of women’s clothes. The *Los Angeles Times* spread the news across the Southland announcing that restrictions would be coming, asserting that the federal government had “no desire to eliminate ‘style’.”⁴²

Back in Washington, D.C, the WPB started the process required to create a clothing limitation order: they called in the so-called “Industry Advisory Committees” (IACs) affiliated with the Textile Branch. IACs, as their name suggests, brought together representatives of specific industry sectors, which the government could call on for advice. By allowing for advanced notice, and by requesting assistance, the WPB hoped to create workable orders with the backing of the affected industry. The orders themselves, with any luck, would become the product of a cooperative relationship between business and government forged for the sake of national economic health.⁴³

Marcus informed the IAC representatives that the fashion industry would be “streamlined” into an “effective mechanism” of war that could satisfy the dual needs of the military and civilians. They acknowledged, importantly, that the federal government found the idea of putting restrictions on private business distasteful, but stressed that war

⁴² “Feminine Fashions Scheduled to be Frozen to Save Cloth,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 1942.

⁴³ It should be noted at this point that IAC members were non-government affiliated members of the business community. This is significant because many of the personnel of the WPB, including Robert R. Guthrie, Chief of the Textile Branch, and Stanley Marcus, served as “dollar-a-year men”. Such personnel received one dollar from the federal government for their services; the rest of their livelihood came from their home employer. The U.S. government also used “Dollar-a-year men” during World War I.

conditions mandated them.⁴⁴ They further stressed that in allowing fashion simplification, the industry would be making a direct contribution to the war effort.⁴⁵

Marcus then outlined two possible methods of fabric conservation. First, Marcus asserted that the WPB could forbid the production of unnecessary “items of fashion,” meaning unnecessary types of clothing. Dresses made entirely of wool, for one, were deemed part of this category because women could just as easily wear dresses made of cotton. Second, he suggested that the WPB could mandate a reduction in the amount of yardage used in a single piece of apparel. Marcus himself argued for the latter method because he believed that it would avoid the “regimentation” of fashion and permit “free range of design for the stylists.”⁴⁶ By “regimentation” he meant that clothing would cease to be civilian, or in other words, be transformed into a uniform. Marcus then explained that if the nation produced millions of garments that were exactly the same (i.e. same color, same fabric) this would place a dramatic strain on specific raw materials. Variation, conversely, meant that nothing would be tapped excessively.⁴⁷ If all women dressed alike because the quantity of styles was limited, he further asserted, this would be detrimental to civilian morale because individuals would not be able to express their own sense of personal style.

By using the term “regimentation,” and thereby acknowledging the possibility of fashion “unregimentation,” Marcus revealed his belief, and the belief on the part of the

⁴⁴ “Verbatim Proceedings: Informal Conference of Women’s Dress Industry,” February 19, 1942, 4.

⁴⁵ “Verbatim Proceedings Women’s and Children’s Coats and Suits,” February 20, 1942, 1.

⁴⁶ “Women’s and Children’s Coats and Suits,” 1

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

entire WPB and their Textile Branch, that the fashion industry should be able to function during the war albeit in a limited manner. While “unregimented” fashion sanctioned differentiation between the garments of various manufactures by permitting the introduction of elements of style (thereby maintaining competition within the markets) and allowed for the maintenance of the pursuit of profit (thereby protecting the U.S. economy and the economic system of capitalism), the opposite would destroy the U.S. fashion industry for the duration of the war. While the first permitted an allowance for individual style (thereby assisting in the maintenance of morale), “regimented” fashion forced clothing to become purely functional which would only make civilians less cooperative over time.

Marcus indeed repeatedly informed the representatives of the fashion industry that the federal government had no intentions of destroying fashion. He asserted, in his words, that they would be mandating “conservation through simplification,” not conservation through the elimination of style. “Simplification,” more specifically, in the opinion of Marcus meant conservation “through the elimination of those details that are not completely essential to the manufacture or making of a satisfactory garment.”⁴⁸

On February 18, in the immediate aftermath of the IAC meetings, the *New York Times* reported on a speech given by H. Stanley Marcus to the Fashion Group, a collective of fashion industry professionals. American fashion designers, Marcus declared, must accept the call to perform the “great patriotic job of making that which is left over for civilian consumption go as far as possible, and making it as good as

⁴⁸ “Women’s Dress Industry,” 4.

possible.” He then placed in the hands of the designers a great responsibility: “They must take the materials available and add to them ideas so fresh and so original that the new products will have merit in their own right.” Significantly, Marcus explained the place of fashion in wartime: “I find no desire on anyone’s part to eliminate it [fashion],” he noted, “only the necessity of circumscribing it for the duration.” He declared, in simple terms, what he considered to be incompatible with war. “Any tendency toward longer and fuller skirts, or extravagant use of materials would be about the worst fashion from an economic and patriotic point of view.”⁴⁹ The fashion designers, Marcus implied, needed to become an important war worker who could (and would) teach women who to participate in fashion in the context of war.

The Textile Branch of the WPB would eventually held at least seven conferences with their various IACs, and at time between January and February 1942 and these meetings oftentimes remained contentious. Maurice Rentner of Maurice Rentner New York, a ready-to-wear dress manufacturing company and a frequent devil’s advocate at the conferences, argued at one point that a woman would not, perhaps even could not, own a dress without a matching jacket. Marcus responded that the committee needed to forget what women allegedly wanted; the question, he asserted, was what women needed. Eventually, those who disagreed kept their mouth shut, and talk center around an acknowledgement of obligations to the cause. Harry Sterngold of University Frocks, for one, countering the statements made by Rentner, declared: “This is war. The government isn’t asking us to conserve because there is any fun in it. Our soldiers have

⁴⁹ “Urges Utmost Use of Fashion Talent,” *New York Times*, February 18, 1942.

to be covered.”⁵⁰ Wartime circumstances, the committee agreed, had necessitated a reorientation of thinking and significant changes in behavior; the fashion industry, all understood, needed to act as responsibly if the nation hoped to achieve victory.

The “Original” L-85

General Limitation Order L-85 in its original form, released on April 8, opened with the rationale for the policy:

The fulfillment of requirement for the defense of the United States has created the shortage in the supply of wool, silk, rayon, cotton, and linen for defense, for private account and for export; and the following order is deemed necessary and appropriate in the public interest and to promote national defense.⁵¹

This order – the result of the discussions between the Textile Branch and their IACs – in itself exemplified U.S. war mobilization policy in that it allowed the continue functioning of the fashion industry while still strongly pressing for conservation restricting civilian production.⁵²

⁵⁰ “Women’s Dress Industry,” February 19, 1942, 20-21

⁵¹ “Feminine Apparel for Outer Wear and Certain Other Garments”, General Limitation Order L-85, *Federal Register*, April 10, 1942.

⁵² Two amendments came before the passage of three months, on April 21 and May 22, respectively, although these simply elucidated confusing language. ⁵² “Notes on Clearance Committee Meeting,” April 17, 1942 (Doc. 377). In addition to the amendments, the WPB released one “interpretation” of L-85 on July 10 which asserted that “feminine apparel made for employees of Government contrasts must conform to the restrictions of the order.” The same day, the WPB rereleased L-85 thus combining the original order, the two amendments, and the one interpretation “for the purpose of clarification.” As time would tell, this version of the order would only last a little over a year: until May 26, 1943. By that point, the WPB had replaced the Textile, Clothing, and Leather Branch with a Textile, Clothing and Leather Division, and they issued a dramatically different version of L-85. Between November and December of 1942, the WPB chose to reorganize all Industry Branches into Industry Divisions. The WPB expanded the branches so that they could direct all actions relating to their specific industry including conversion, conservation, production, and distribution.

L-85, first and foremost, restricted the production of all pieces of “feminine apparel” (i.e. coats, skirts, slacks, blouses, etc.) in all size ranges (i.e. “regular women,” “stout women,” “junior misses,” “girls,” etc) by means of three key methods.⁵³ First, it forbade outright certain design features that used large volumes of fabric such as balloon and dolman sleeves, or pleating and tucking. Second, it mandated maximum measurements for all aspects of clothing such as hem width, sleeve length, and skirt sweep (Figure 11).⁵⁴ These first two provisions forced fashion designers to reduce the amount of materials used in a single garment. This would increase the ultimate quantity of clothing produced for the civilian market out of the limited stock of raw materials thereby protecting the military’s access to the same. This would also lead to the design of simple clothing, meaning clothing with less ornamentation and/or frills. Finally, L-85 also forbade the sale of matching accessories with coats or dresses (i.e. purses, hats, capes, boleros, scarves, etc.), forcing the fashion industry to sell these items separately.

Collectively, the above three measures embedded in L-85 effectively allowed the WPB to demand in fashion producers and consumers an acceptance of wartime values. By placing maximum measurements, the WPB mandated fabric economy and stopped the frivolous use of resources, and thereby demanded acceptance of the wartime value of frugality. By mandating design restrictions, thereby eliminating wasteful design elements,

⁵³ The limitation order included a definition these size categories (i.e. “women’s”, “misses’, etc).

⁵⁴ *Women’s Wear Daily*, April 9, 1942

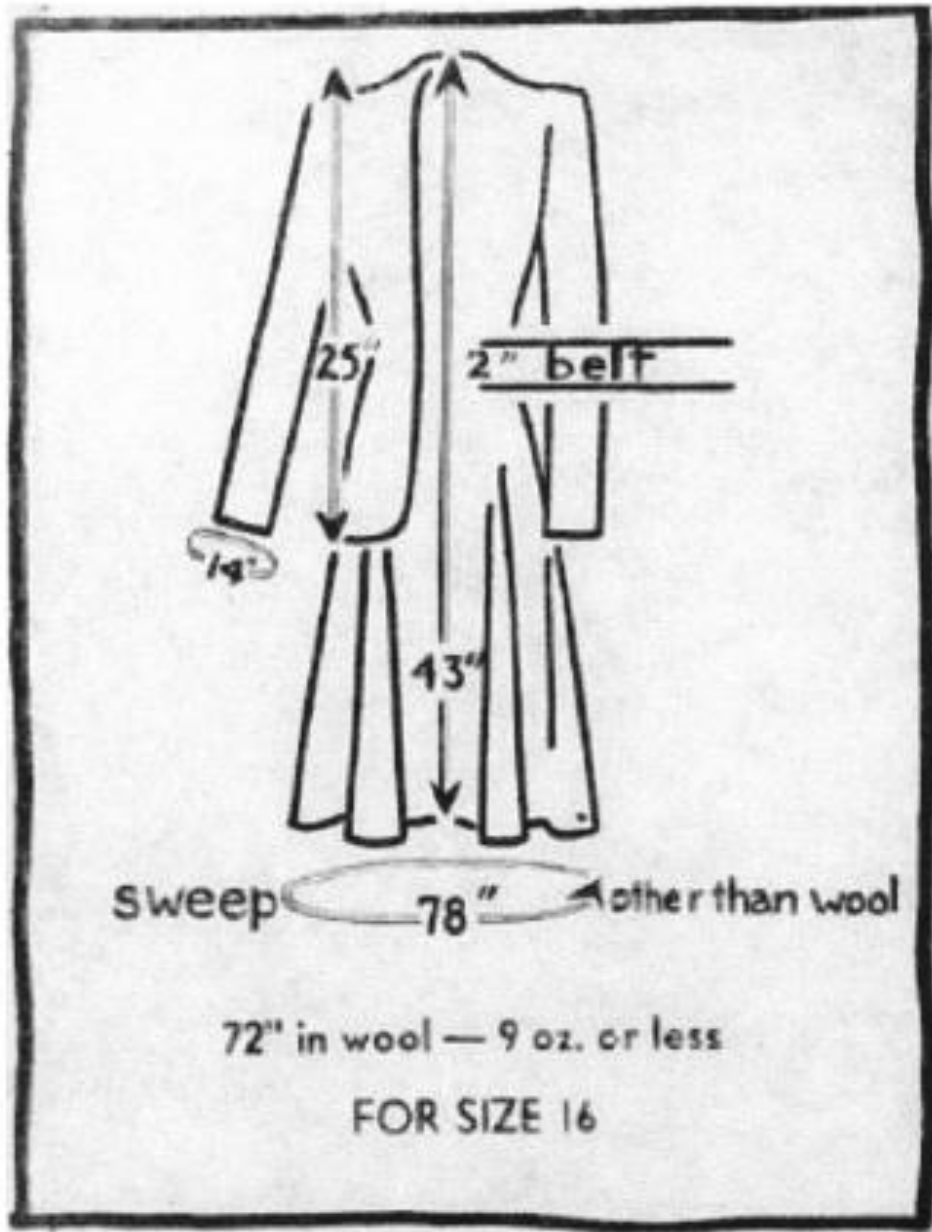


Figure 11
Women's Wear Daily's Graphic Representation of L-85, 1942.

they eliminated conspicuous consumption, and demanded wartime self-control. The sum total of these changes was a transformation of fashion itself.

As the restrictions in L-85 demonstrated these new wartime values, the exclusions to the order reveal the WPB's commitment to core national values that needed to be protected even in times of war. By excluding bridal gowns, the WPB demonstrated the nation's dedication to marriage as the social institution that grounded family life, and suggested that this must be celebrated even for the duration through wedding ceremonies. By excluding maternity clothing, they asserted that women becoming mothers deserved special privileges. By excluding burial clothing, the WPB asserted the nation's collective respect for its dead; by excluding religious garments, they proved to the general public that they would not be interfering with the free exercise of religious beliefs. By providing an appeal process, thereby allowing individual producers to be excluded by the restrictions, the WPB additionally through L-85 proved the U.S. remained cognizant of its commitment to protecting its citizens from unwarranted economic problems. Those who felt that the order would bring them an "exceptional and unreasonable hardship" could request such assistance from the federal government.

Even more so, through the act of transforming fashion through design restrictions, the WPB effectively set the stage for the creation of a powerful rhetoric of patriotic fashion, which could, in turn, help connect individual consumers to the war effort. James T. Sparrow informs that "government propagandists learned from confidential survey research that simply imploring civilians to 'do their part' and 'sacrifice' was not sufficient to motivate them to comply with the many requirements of

war mobilization,” and instead “the most effective appeals were those that personalized government messages while downplaying overly ideological statements.” From this, he suggests that in the “rhetorical universe” that was homefront United States, “defense workers were promoted to ‘soldiers of production,’ home gardens became ‘victory gardens,’ and young women willing to socialize with soldiers called ‘victory girls.’” “Even the most private or mundane aspects of life were made relevant to the war effort,” concludes Sparrow, “usually by contrasting civilian concerns with the drastic sacrifices of idealized combat soldiers.”⁵⁵

Even though L-85 did not apply to consumers, and instead only restricted the industrial production of fashion, L-85 in effect transformed fashion into patriotic chic, which would then motivate individual consumers to accept fashion restrictions in their lives. L-85, even more so, first gave women the language to articulate, and later the exact means to demonstrate their fulfillment of their obligations to the war effort. Accepting clothing restrictions was deemed patriotic; the opposite gave the appearance of excess and was consequently deemed treasonous. Certain elements within society even went as far as to suggest that consumers that they could perform their patriotism on their bodies through their clothing choices. Individual adherence to government policies could be visibly seen- and therefore presumably enforced- by other consumers in the court of public opinion.

⁵⁵ Sparrow, 71-72.

The Textile Branch of the WPB believed that this original L-85 would allow all consumers to purchase what they require, and eliminate the need for apparel rationing while protecting important cultural institutions in the United States. L-85, importantly, however, did not impose restrictions on consumers. It could not stop women from purchasing jackets in the men's wear department if they felt as though the women's jackets sold were too short. *Women's Wear Daily* reported on June 6, 1942 that 68.97 percent of women polled at Smith College said they would consider doing so.⁵⁶ And while the WPB could force the compliance of sewing patterns to L-85, it could not stop women from sewing their own clothes to their own designed measurements. It, moreover, did not restrict how many dresses, skirts, or slacks a single consumer could purchase. Given that L-85 did not restrict consumer behavior, what was to stop consumers from using their newly acquired incomes to purchase increasing amounts of apparel thus negating any raw material savings? Moreover, what would stop fashion retailers, like those in Los Angeles, from aggressively marketing women as much legal fashion as they could? It would be the consequences of these shortcomings that would soon be felt across the Southland.

⁵⁶ "Smith College Girls React to L-85," *Women's Wear Daily*, June 3, 1942

Chapter 2: The Playground's Playclothes Gone to War: The California Fashion Industry, 1930-1945

In January 1943, *California Stylist*, the top trade journal of the state's apparel industry, featured an advertisement for California Victory Garment's "Blue Ribbon Slacks."¹ "Six inspired executives" from "three leading manufacturers" of California sportswear had joined forces to provide female defense workers with "style in work clothes" by adapting California sportswear into California workwear. Featured in this ad were two women dressed for wartime work in button-down plaid shirts with folding collars and "crease resistant, dust resistant, and wear resistant" slacks. The "slim fitting" belted waistline of the pleated front slacks purposefully emphasized the curves of the feminine bodies. The floral protective head cloths complimented, allowing just a few exposed curls to sneak through at the forehead. These were the middle-class Rosie the Riveters of an unnamed Los Angeles war plant, just as the one in the propaganda poster: perfectly coiffed and stylishly (yet efficiently) dressed, doing their part to help win the war without looking unfashionable, unfeminine, or unkempt. Perhaps if the advertisement was in color, we would see their lipstick-painted lips and rouge-colored cheeks (Figure 12).² These women in their feminized workwear and painted faces, the ad implied, remained gender compliant: they would not be calling into question established gender norms while they temporarily worked on the factory floor. The

¹ The Associated Apparel Manufacturers of Los Angeles (AAMLA) published *California Stylist*.

² "California Victory Garments, Inc." *California Stylist*, March 1943.



Figure 12

*Advertisement for California Victory Garments, Inc
California Stylist, March 1943*

Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

fashion industry had stepped up to help smooth the transition into work for women across the United States.

Just this kind of “fashionable” workwear could be purchased in the fanciest department stores in Los Angeles. There, specialty war workers’ shops sought to tap a new market: the quarter of a million female workers in Southern California who had entered the factories by 1943 and now needed appropriately feminine workwear.³ They also likely understood that many of the working-class women who had worked before the war would also benefit from increased wages and thus had additional amounts of disposable income. Department stores across the city, indeed department stores across the nation in centers of war production (i.e. Detroit, Baltimore, and the San Francisco Bay Area), had in fact anticipated high demand for workwear, and, as a result, began aggressively marketing stylized work ensembles early in the war.⁴ In the case of Bullock’s Wilshire, a replica of a workers’ entrance gate and a sign reading “Entrance Workers Only” established this section of the store as exclusive. The AAMLA actively encouraged department stores to carry stylized work apparel and display them in this manner for reasons of both patriotism and economics. They asserted that by doing so the fashion community would be “doing their part to encourage Miss America...and the Mrs. too... to enter [the] defense industry.”⁵ They also happily understood that increased rates

³ “Overalls With Chic,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1943

⁴ Edward J. Gleason, “Huge Cut Forecast for Civilian Cloth,” *New York Times*, November 29, 1942.

⁵ Virginia Scallon, “Stream-Lined Industrial Wardrobe Dramatizes the War Worker...Recruits New Volunteers,” *California Stylist*, June 1943, 122. For a discussion of factory owners attempts to control women’s dress on the factory floor see: Eileen Boris, “Desirable Dress: Rosies, Sky Girls, and the Politics of Appearance,” *International Labor and Working Class History* 69 (2006): 123-142.

of employment for women in Southern California would benefit the entire fashion industry both by infusing the market with their disposable income and increasing demand for work clothing, preferably in the design of California sportswear.⁶

Department stores across the city further enticed customers into their stores, and tickled their patriotism with war-themed street-front window and display counters. The consumers themselves, however, probably needed little encouragement: long deprived during the Great Depression, they surged into the marketplace, backed by the flush wartime economy that had enriched the nation. The “Keep the Flag Flying” store front window at Bullock’s Downtown was joined by a store entryway so dubbed the “Aisle of Flags” where “elongated satin banners ... painted electric blue” displayed the “seals of all nations.”⁷ Bronze plaques featured the names of former employees currently serving in the armed forces, and a special counter on the main shopping floor sold war bonds and stamps.⁸ The department stores even transformed the saving stamp itself into a piece of wearable fashion: the so-called “Victory Corsage” where the stamps were surrounded by

⁶ In order to demonstrate the business potential of workwear, *California Stylist* reported that the Vega Aircraft Corporation had decided against uniforms for their workers, believing that they would only hinder morale (and thus reduce total output) by destroying “individuality and personality.” Regardless of the official government stance, some companies opted for worker uniforms. North American Aviation in Inglewood, California, mandated blue slacksuits with the company’s emblem on the sleeve; indeed, they issued several safety regulations mandating slacks, hair nets, and low-heeled, close toed shoes, likely to the chagrin of both female workers and fashion designers. “Airplane Factory Workers Wear Smart California Slacks,” *California Stylist*, January 1942; “Hiring of Women for Actual Warplanes’ Work Starts Here,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 12, 1942; Nadine Mason, “Aircraft Women Stress Safety,” *Los Angeles Times* August 23, 1942. For a thoughtful discussion on women’s work apparel and efforts on the part of companies to restrict freedom of expression, see Eileen Boris.

⁷ “Retailers for Victory,” *California Stylist*, August 1942, 66.

⁸ “This is the Way We Sell Our Clothes in California,” *California Stylist*, April 1943, 48.

artificial leaves.⁹ In a celebration of capitalism justified by the quest to win the war, bonds and brassieres, stamps and slacks were purchased together by citizens doing their part for the war effort by shopping (Figure 12).¹⁰

Wartime material shortages and the application of L-85 resulted in the production of streamlined clothing created by fashion designers who demonstrated ingenuity in the face of restrictions by innovating style. In a politically expedient and business savvy move, the fashion industry did not stop there. On the surface, the AAMLA communally and certain designers individually touted the virtues of fashion patriotism, and how they felt “privileged” to assist in the war effort through their conservation of scarce materials.¹¹ In reality, however, this constituted a thinly veiled, highly lucrative marketing strategy that combined preexisting positive associations with the state of California and Hollywood with the newly created patriotic conservation rhetoric of “use it up, wear it out, make it do” created by the federal government. In so doing, advertisements co-opted patriotism to extract the female consumer’s newly found disposable income, and consequently, foster consumption in the short term while boosting the status of the California fashion industry in the long term. The AAMLA thus encouraged department stores to provide their customers with the opportunity to shop for “patriotic chic” ready-to-wear in department stores with war bond counter and war-themed decorations, knowing that they would be able to spend their dollars on little else because of WPB mandates. The necessary act of altering design, done to avoid WPB

⁹ “Retailers for Victory,” *California Stylist*, August 1942, 66.

¹⁰ Cohen, 8 and 67.

¹¹ “One Frog Paddled,” *Time*.

prosecution, was capitalized on by smart designers with coordinated public relations campaign launched to demonstrate to the general public, and the federal government, that the imperatives of a war society were being acknowledged. Sportswear designers created and marketed “California” designer factory apparel with deliberate feminine detailing to women workers, middle- and working class, also at the encouragement of the AAMLA, capitalizing on both their wartime wages and pressured placed on women to remain gender conformist on the factory floor, thus completing the marketing cycle.

By continuing to sell fashion and thus participate in the system of free enterprise, the Los Angeles fashion community did maintain this important segment of the American economy, and by using their advertising dollar to promote the war effort, they cooperated with the federal government. Following the dictates of the WPB, they allowed fashion to become a “mechanism of war,” as described in chapter one. Sportswear designers thus provided L-85 compliant work and leisurewear to women, and in doing so, potentially provided women with the means to participate in a communal performance of patriotism in which they could demonstrate their fulfillment of their obligations to the war effort. Simultaneously, however, by releasing and re-releasing aggressive marketing campaigns that did not encourage restraint in shopping in any way, the fashion community, contradicted, and in effect possibly negated, government anti-inflation campaigns encouraging consumers to “use it up, wear it up, make it do.”

Cinema Queens, Saleswomen: The California Fashion and Hollywood in Peace

Metro regarded me as a clotheshorse as well as a dancer and an actress. I think more money was spent on my wardrobe, per movie, than on the script. . . . The Crawford wardrobes had some practical application because they could be copied so easily, all the way down from Mainbocher to Sears.¹²

Joan Crawford thus described, in this 1980 interview with Roy Newquist, the way she and others became, according to the studio vernacular, “clotheshorses.” As such, her primary function was to serve as a living fashion model, and accordingly, her wardrobe on and off the screen remained under tight control of studio executives and their publicity departments. Crawford recognized that she had a duty to appear fashionable, even in her everyday life. “I was obliged to be glamorous,” she noted. “In my day a star owed the public a continuation of the image that made her a star in the first place.”¹³

From its very start Hollywood film studios understood that they could connect their actresses to the clothing they wore on the screen and create spectacular profits.¹⁴ Hollywood director and producer Cecil B. DeMille, indeed, argued that Hollywood emerged in response to the demands of publicity, advertising, and sales professionals in New York who wanted movies with “plenty of clothes, rich sets, and actions” with which to connect their products.¹⁵

¹² Roy Newquist and Joan Crawford, *Conversations with Joan Crawford* (New York: Citadel Press, 1980), 57.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁴ Eckert, 5.

¹⁵ Charles Eckert, “The Carole Lombard in Macy’s Window,” *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 3 (1978): 4-7.

By the late 1920s and early 1930s, the studios began working hard to improve Hollywood's reputation as a worldwide fashion capital.¹⁶ The rationale behind this decision was economic. Faced with the hardships of the Great Depression, the studios needed to find additional revenue streams. They also feared that if they did not help direct the movement of fashion, given the long length of production schedules, their films would appear dated and this would hurt attendance. Studio executives asked their costume designers to create original looks for both filming and public appearances, and thus bypass the style leadership of Paris.¹⁷

The executives, in turn, launched the process to turn one-of-a-kind film costume into commercialized mass-produced and mass-consumed ready-to-wear apparel. The studios, with the exception of Warner Bros. who handled design and distribution themselves, sent sketches of costume designs to the Modern Merchandising Bureau in advance of the film's release. This company, founded in 1930, in turn, evaluated the designs and then decided which styles should be manufactured.¹⁸ In 1934, Warner Bros. studio joined in on the game. They began licensing duplicates of Orry-Kelly's costume

¹⁶ Berry argues that in the 1910s and 1920s, established fashion, embodied by the magazines *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, considered Hollywood fashion to be déclassé. *Vogue*, for one, published an article by Cecil Beaton where he described Hollywood as "a wilderness of vulgarities." It would not be until 1934 when Saks Fifth Avenue reproduced the designs of Omar Kiam for the film *Folies Bergère*, which were later photographed for *Harper's Bazaar*, that Hollywood designs gained credibility. Sarah Berry, *Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 15.

¹⁷ Berry argues that Hollywood became increasingly independent from the style centers of Paris and New York as the decade of the 1930s progressed. "As sportswear and casual ready-to-wear became an increasingly visible segment of the American garment market," she writes, "the traditional flow of design innovation from Paris to New York was countered by both Hollywood's influence and the increasing autonomy of American designers." *Ibid.*, xxi.

¹⁸ Eckert, 8.

designs under the brand name “Studio Styles.”¹⁹ By the time of a film’s release, stores across the nation had in their stocks film-inspired licensed merchandise.²⁰ In time for the release of United Artists’ *Vogues of 1938*, for example, the bureau had fifty-two dresses ready for sale at department stores across the United States.²¹ Exploitation departments placed articles in fan magazines and newspapers depicting movie stars in their signature looks as part of the established “star system” in which up and coming young actresses were glamorized and then sold to the consuming public. Joan Crawford the actress thus became synonymous with Gilbert Adrian’s square-shouldered suits, and films during her “clothes horse” phase were released partly in order to showcase the creations of that designer.²² As one commentator noted, “California has Hollywood, whose glamour is purposely and profitably exploited – every cinema queen is a saleswoman to the nation” (Figure 13).²³

Importantly, however, Hollywood’s ability to effect fashion change remained somewhat limited. Sarah Berry, author of *Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood*, cogently explains the double purpose of Hollywood film costume. She suggests that first and foremost film costume needed to be “dramatic spectacle” to inspire fashion awe. This would ensure that consumers would desire what was put before them.

¹⁹Berry, 17.

²⁰ Ibid., 17-22.

²¹ “Cinema: The New Pictures: August 30, 1937,” *Time*, August 30, 1937.

²² Robert J. Corber, “Joan Crawford’s Padded Shoulders: Female Masculinity in *Mildred Pierce*,” *Camera Obscura* 63 (2006): 1-32.

²³ Berry, 16 and 18.



Figure 13
 Advertisement for Studio Styles
Vogue, March 1935.

This advertisement featured the creations of Warner Bros. costume designer Orry-Kelly modeled by the actresses Margaret Lindsay, Ann Dvorak, Dorothy Dare, and Glenda Farrell. Advertisements for film-inspired licensed merchandise frequently utilized this strategy, thus demonstrating the “clothes horse” role of the Hollywood actress.

Simultaneously, however, film costume needed to be re-creatable otherwise the ability of the film studios to mass market film-inspired designs would be destroyed. Given this, unlike Parisian haute couture, Hollywood film costume needed to be eye-catching but not ground-breaking, innovative yet familiar without dramatic style innovation. Hollywood costume designers took preexisting fashion and made them more desirable to consumers by associating them with Hollywood stars.²⁴ A grander, theatrical version of a look would be depicted in a film; its simpler, streamlined cousin would be sold in department stores. As Berry writes: “Hollywood costume designs often represented a kind of stylistic mannerism: it took a familiar line and made it spectacular.”²⁵ When Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, and Katherine Hepburn began wearing pants in public and allowed themselves to be photographed doing so, millions of women across the globe took notice and dressed accordingly (Figure 14).²⁶

The studios thus cultivated the ability to present consumers with a product of their own design, thereby capitalizing on the work of the costume designers to increase profit margins. As this remained dependent upon the movies’ reputation for glamour, the studios continually released and re-released extravagant motion pictures with stylish, fashion-forward costumes and backed the resulting licensed ready-to-wear garments with aggressive marketing campaigns in fan magazines and synergetic department store tie-ins. The studios thus desired to be nothing less than the ultimate creator of desire: the director of worldwide fashion consumption and the business capable of producing sales

²⁴ Berry, xx.

²⁵ Ibid., xx.

²⁶ Berry, 158.



Figure 14
Katherine Hepburn publicity photograph for RKO, circa 1938.

The ability of Hollywood to effect change in fashion styles is well demonstrated by the gradual acceptance of women wearing slacks or lounging “pajama” pants.

and securing fantastic profits behind the façade of Joan Crawford’s square shoulders. In doing so, they would blur the lines between the glamour of Hollywood, the entertainment of the movies, and the big business of fashion.

**A “California Original”:
California Sportswear in Peace**

Dietrich’s, Garbo’s, and Hepburn’s slacks point to a second connected yet equally important component of the California fashion industry: sportswear. Lawrence Culver’s *The Frontier of Leisure: Southern California and the Shaping of Modern America* contributes to our understanding of the place California held in popular memory by suggesting the importance of leisure culture. He argues that the “growth of Los Angeles was inextricably connected to its promotion as a place of recreation.” Culver demonstrates how Charles Fletcher Lummis and other boosters in the late nineteenth century laid a framework that would be later built upon in the 1930s and 1940s: they promoted the “Great Southwest” as a community for which sport was a “way of life,” and then marketed California as a worldwide tourist destination.²⁷ The author further shows how the leisure and recreation culture of California became and remained closely connected to the state’s natural and cultural landscapes--its coastline, its mountain resorts, and its sports fields. Visitors and residents alike participated in sunbathing and ocean-swimming as well as the sports of polo, golf, and tennis. Facilities, as well as

²⁷ Lawrence Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure: Southern California and the Shaping of Modern America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 52 and 17.

entire communities, sprang up to meet consumer demand for such activities.²⁸ The hastily setup tents of the 1910s became seaside communities in the 1920s; winter resorts in cities like Truckee in the Sierra Nevadas provided tourists with lodges to access ski slopes.²⁹ With time, participation in sport developed into a distinctive California outdoor lifestyle and culture. Unlike the rest of the nation who still favored a pale complexion, the Southern Californian prized the deliberate suntan.³⁰ The state's outdoor lifestyle led to extreme health consciousness and a cult of the thin body.³¹

Gradually the very lifestyle of California – the pursuit of sport, sunshine, and sand – led California-based designers to create clothing to suit. Soon, these entrepreneurs realized that they could transform “sportswear” from the apparel of sporting into fashionable, casual leisurewear that was smart enough even for city life. The merchandise manager for the Ville de Paris so noted in 1924: “Los Angeles sets the pace in styles of sport wear, outing clothing, sweaters and other lines of wearing apparel, and there is no reason why we cannot set the pace in styles of ready-to-wear.” He continued: “All that is needed is to use the same methods of designing and producing

²⁸ Kevin Starr, *The Dream Endures: California Enters the 1940s* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 15-18.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

ready-to-wear as have characterized the operations of other lines in order to greatly increase the output through Los Angeles retailers, and also corral a big share of nationwide business.”³²

By the 1930s, California based manufacturers including Louella Ballerino, Agnes Barrett, Viola Dimmitt, Peggy Hunt, Addie Masters, and Marjorie Montgomery dominated the U.S. sportswear market.³³ *Business Week* reported in September 1940 that California was becoming to sportswear what Paris was to evening gowns. They further reported that given this, department stores across the United States sent buyers out west to see what fashionable women wore at play and then featured such garments in California sportswear departments.³⁴ This marked the gradual transformation of California from a regional producer, supplying the fashion needs of the western United States, to a nationally known creator of style.

Designers proudly attached labels onto their garments that emphasized that they were made in California (Figure 15).³⁵ Advertisements further emphasized this. One from Best & Company featured in the *New York Times* proudly presented “famous California

³² Ville de Paris was a department store in downtown Los Angeles. “Plan Style Week for Home Goods,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1924.

³³ “California Leads in Sports Styles,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 1937.

³⁴ “Los Angeles Becomes Style Center,” *Business Week*, September 14, 1940.

³⁵ William Ramsey Scott, “Modernism, Masculinity, and the Men’s Leisurewear Industry in California, 1930-1960 (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2007), 25-26; William R. Scott, “California Casual: Lifestyle Marketing and Men’s Leisurewear,” in *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers*, ed. Regina Blaszczyk (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 174.

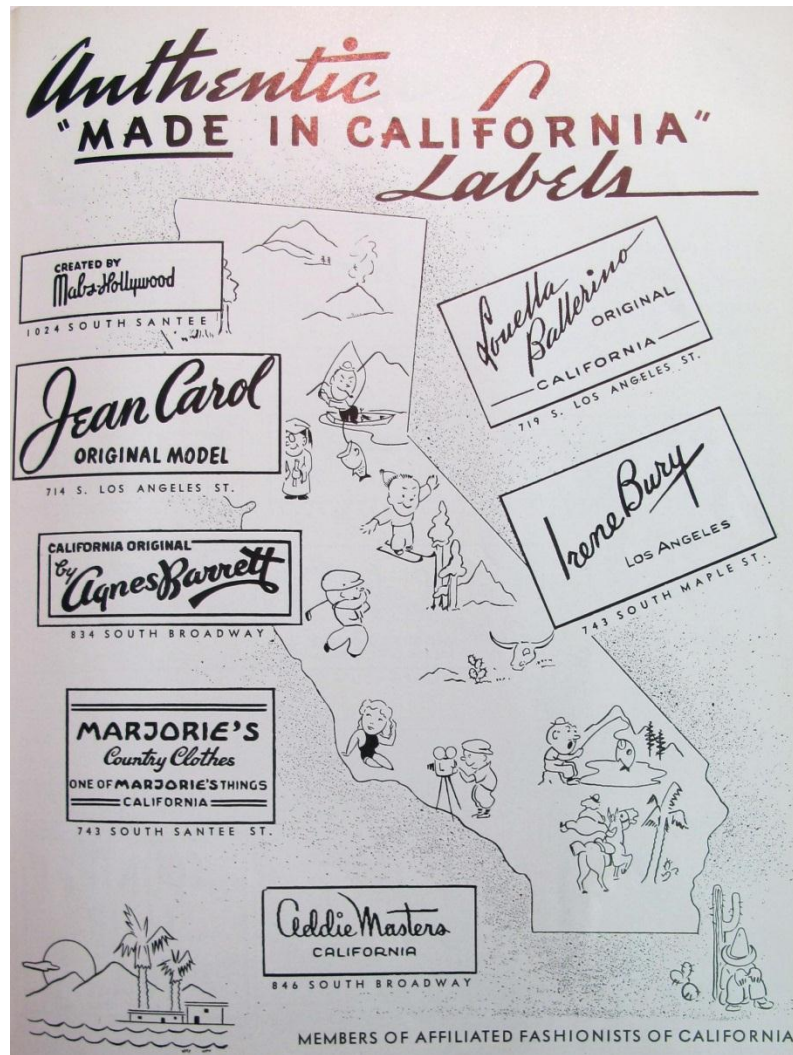


Figure 15
Authentic "Made in California" Labels
California Stylist, April 1942
Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art



WAIKIKI WONDER.
Russeks' designer has with
much to suggest. Modest
parts. White on top, and
dark on bottom. Yellow
trim. Great skill with
Madame's work. Don't miss
it! Ask, ask and ask.

WE'RE READY WITH OUR CARAVAN OF
CALIFORNIA PLAYCLOTHES
AND NOWHERE ELSE (EXCEPT IN
CALIFORNIA) WILL YOU FIND THEM!

Figure 16
Advertisement for Russeks
New York Times, May 11, 1941

denims” and other items to the women of the East Coast. Another from Russeks advertised a “caravan of California play clothes” (Figure 16).³⁶

Unlike the creators of Hollywood film costume, and the resulting film-inspired licensed merchandise, the sportswear designers sought true style independence, although even they aggressively connected themselves to the glamour of Hollywood by using actresses as models in their advertisements (Figure 17). Organizations including the Hollywood Fashion Associates, the California Apparel Creators, and the Associated Apparel Manufacturers of Los Angeles (AAMLA) each worked to increase the prestige of Southern California based clothing manufacturing. Each desired to transform Los Angeles into a world-wide style center.

The availability of low-cost labor in Southern California, importantly, greatly facilitated the rise of Los Angeles as a “garment town” in the 1930s.³⁷ Low wages and bad conditions plagued workers during this period as unions remained weak due to the presence of open shop policies.³⁸ Mexican and Mexican American women dominated the labor pool, constituting three-quarters of the workforce in 1933. Employers blatantly ignored state minimum wage laws, and hired and fired workers to keep wages even more

³⁶ Best & Company, *New York Times*, December 26, 1937; Russeks, *New York Times*, May 11, 1941. Best & Company and Russeks were both New York department stores on Fifth Avenue.

³⁷ In their March 1931 edition of *Southern California Business*, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce claimed the title of “garment town” for their city thereby asserting their status as a worldwide creator of style. James H. Collins, “On the Map as a Garment Town,” *Southern California Business*, March 1931.

³⁸ Scott, “Modernism,” 26-27.

Hostess Pajamas

By Addie Masters

Once again . . . complete fashion mastery in CEL-ANESE* RAYON JERSANESE* . . . modelled by Jinx Falkenburg (Columbia star) in softly tailored navy jersey highlighted by powder blue and flame. Also comes in black with Chinese red and lime. Sizes 10-20 . . . \$12.75.

One of a superb collection of hostess and lounging pajamas in prints and plain fabrics. ALSO—casual dresses.

SHOWING DURING MARKET WEEK, JAN. 18-22
Biltmore Hotel, Room 3112-14

*Buy U. S. PAT. OFF. **ADDIE MASTERS** Los Angeles
846 S. Bdway.

Figure 17
 Advertisement for Addie Masters (detail)
California Stylist, September 1942
 Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

unstable. Constant immigration into the city from south of the border kept wages even lower. Sweatshop conditions in Los Angeles, consequently, were among the worst in the nations with workers earning often less than five dollars a week.³⁹ In the words of one union agitator: “Southern California, land of sunshine and starvation wages.”⁴⁰ High-end sportswear intended to be worn by middle- and upper-class white women was thus designed and manufactured in California, in many cases by women who could not hope to afford it. Despite the designation made by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, and any advantages gained from exploiting workers, the city was by no means as strong in terms of fashion production as New York, which, of course, also in many ways based on the exploitation of workers. In 1939, New York produced over \$1 billion worth of women’s apparel, while Los Angeles produced a mere \$25 million.⁴¹

Colorfully Californian Wartime Sportswear: The California Fashion Industry in War

In the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor and the U.S. declaration of war, *California Stylist* reported that the promotion of California fashion would continue for the spring 1942 season with fashion show openings to be held between January 18 and 22. Two months later, they announced that the war would not be stopping the fall 1942

³⁹ Zaragosa Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 84.

⁴⁰ Scott “Modernism,” 24-28.

⁴¹ “Apparel Manufacturing in Los Angeles: A Report Requested by Assembly Resolution Number 84, Fifty-Fifth (Fourth Extraordinary) California Legislature” (Sacramento: California State Recovery and Reemployment Commission, 1945), 18.

openings either to be held between July 12 and 15.⁴² In a complementary editorial titled “Stylists Go All-Out for Defense” the AAMLA explained the reasons why they chose to continue. After recounting the tale of “courageous little shop-keepers” in England who hung signs reading “Business as Usual” in their store windows in the wake of the Blitz, they stressed that they were determined to do their “part” to win the war for the United Nations. They then explained to their readers exactly what they meant:

We are fighting to get rid of a Fascist threat, to free our shipping lanes, and to preserve the principles indispensable to the democratic way of life. And we are fighting for our families and for “business as usual.” You know and the California Stylist knows that the surest way to lose these aims is to shuffle them off into obscurity for the duration.... It is imperative that we carry on to come through with the least possible disruption in our ordinary lives.

To launch their efforts, the AAMLA announced that half of the proceeds from advertising sales from the April and May editions would be used to purchase Defense Bonds.⁴³

By continuing with the “business as usual” of fashion shows, as well as the business of creating of new fashion styles to be seen in them, the AAMLA maintained the rituals of the fashion industry while propagating an ideology of free enterprise as an exercise of nationalism and wartime patriotism, just as suggested by Cohen and McGovern. Regardless of the above statements, however, “business as usual” was a thing of the past. By purchasing war bonds with the proceeds from the sale of advertisements in the *California Stylist*, the AAMLA publicly demonstrated to the fashion-consuming public their approval of war-induced changes, and more importantly,

⁴²“No Blackout,” *California Stylist*, January 1942, 37; “Southland Manufacturers Plan Market Week,” *California Stylist*, March 1942, 11. For coverage of the January fashion shows in the *Los Angeles Times* see: “Fashion Event To Open Today,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 19, 1942.

⁴³ “Stylists Go All-Out for Defense,” *California Stylist*, March 1942, 13.

their commitment to the ideals of international democracy and free enterprise by financially supporting the war effort.

They and the rest of the U.S. fashion industry understood that compliance with government mandates, like the WPB's L-85, was not a choice. They also understood that in the hyper-patriotic environment that was the homefront U.S.A., consumers might expect the business community to do their part, and might even be compelled to patronize entrepreneurs and support organizations who acted accordingly. Given these realities, instead of simply continuing with "business as usual," the AAMLA was political: they presented themselves as a patriotic entity that could (and would) take the lead in encouraging proper wartime behavior.⁴⁴ They thus encouraged department stores across the state to do the same, and follow the example of Bullocks and Bullocks Wilshire in their creation of patriotic street-front window displays. "Search out something to 'tie to' in these precarious days, and you'll anchor your salesman-ship in safe waters," they declared, suggesting that such strategies would ensure spectacular wartime profits.⁴⁵

To promote the American ritual of consumption, wartime corporations used their advertising dollars to present themselves as the protectors of American capitalism.⁴⁶ In terms of the fashion industry, this manifested as individual designers describing in advertising copy the "patriotic" tailoring and design changes they made in response to the

⁴⁴McGovern explains that advertisers "cast corporations as the war heroes, assisted ably and cheerfully by the citizen-consumer." My own arguments concerning the AMMLA were influenced by this point. McGovern, 338.

⁴⁵ Virginia Scallon, "Sold American: Retailers Cater to Defense Workers," *California Stylist*, March 1943, 39.

⁴⁶ McGovern, 338.

application of L-85.⁴⁷ The fashion designers was thus rebranded as important war workers who would take the lead in helping (and encouraging) American women navigate the volatile wartime fashion environment. “A clever new wrapped waistline achieves graceful slimness, patriotically eliminating zippers in this exotically flowed Celanese print,” declared an advertisement for Agnes Barrett, suggesting that the designer was going above and beyond the call of duty (Figure 18).⁴⁸ “Buttons down the skirt for a trim, wartime clothing,” so read another for the “V Jumper” (a “v” neck for victory) from Marjorie’s Things (Figure 19).⁴⁹

With the disappearance of consumer durables from the market (i.e. automobiles and washing machines), many spent their newly found available income, now disposable, on consumer non-durables including restaurant meals, theater tickets, floral arrangements, and, importantly, clothing. This was especially true for the quarter of a million women of Southern California who became defense workers by 1943.⁵⁰ “Men and women who had seldom had one coin to rub against another suddenly heard an unmistakable jingle in their pockets,” reported the magazine *Time*. “Girls who had worked as maids for room, board, and peanuts found factory jobs at \$100-\$200 a month.” Young women, who before the war never had money of their own, desired expensive

⁴⁷ Most designers made L-85 mandated changes silently, without commentary on their part.

⁴⁸ “Celanese” is defined in the Fairchild’s Dictionary of Fashion as “a trademark of Celanese Marketing Company once used for acetate filament, yarn, staple, and fabric. Now includes fabrics made from nylon, acetate, and tricetate.” Fairchild’s Dictionary of Fashion, 2nd Edition, 1988. Agnes Barrett, *California Stylist*, September 1942

⁴⁹ Marjorie’s Things, Inc, *California Stylist*, November 1942, 9.

⁵⁰ “Overalls With Chic,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1943; Virginia Scallon, “Stream-lined Industrial Wardrobe Dramatizes the War Worker...Recruits New Volunteers,” *California Stylist*, June 1943, 122,



Figure 18
Advertisement for Agnes Barrett (detail)
California Stylist, September 1942
Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art



... — THE V-Jumper . . . buttons down the skirt for a trim, wartime closing . . . the new look of a V-shaped bodice . . . the season's best new color, purple, in Hess Goldsmith's EMBASSY CLUB rayon faille. For the slick, simple blouse, beige STUNZI rayon crepe. Put them together for the youngest, most appealing jumper-dress to come out of California.

No. 1412 Jumper.....\$4.75 No. 102 Blouse.....\$2.50

MARJORIE'S THINGS INC.

● 743 SOUTH SANTEE STREET, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Figure 19

Advertisement for Marjorie's Things (detail)

California Stylist, November 1942

Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

sportswear and glamorous evening gowns. Young men, unattached to the armed forces, treated themselves to latest trends in menswear.⁵¹

Knowing that consumers would be bombarded with anti-inflation campaigns against excessive spending and patriotic appeals to consumers promoting personal sacrifice and war bond purchase, and knowing that many would still want to shop regardless, savvy fashion designers provided consumers with the means to dissolve feelings of personal guilt from leisure spending, coating it in the appealing veneer of patriotism. Smart entrepreneurs like Agnes Barnett and others thus brought added enjoyment to the experience of shopping, turning it into a doubly therapeutic experience. Consumers would find increased satisfaction with themselves, further stimulating demand, and the industry believed, if they felt as though they were purchasing patriotic, streamlined clothing from patriotic designers more interested in doing their part than making a profit. Something which previously could only satisfy individual consumer desires and boost corporate profits could become a performance of patriotism: a simulation of collective interest played out by the individual on their physical bodies. Abstract ideas of patriotism, this way, became concrete in the form of fashionable dress.

Historian Lizabeth Cohen further explains in *A Consumer's Republic* that “Americans were not so much divided between civic minded ‘good’ consumers and self-interested ‘bad’ consumers; rather, all wrestled with conflicting pressures within themselves, striking their own shifting balances between citizen and purchaser.” She cites how “not everyone, at every moment” accepted homefront consumer regulations,

⁵¹ Kathy Peiss, *Zoot Suit: The Enigmatic Career of an Extreme Style* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 56

and instead sometimes did what they wanted to do, when they wanted to do it. Cohen suggests that this process of internal negotiation was the manner in which individuals navigated between the ideal of the “citizen consumer” and the reality of the “purchaser consumer.”⁵² In the case of clothing consumption, it was not merely a decision between shopping or not. If one could not keep themselves out of department stores and follow the government’s command of sacrifice, they could negotiate an internal compromise and buy the appearance of patriotism. The consumption itself thereby became not an act of profligacy, but rather an act of compliance.

The AAMLA praised California fashion designers for their patriotism, indeed they proudly declared that all designers here were finding ways to navigate the challenges inherent in complying with L-85. In May 1942 one AAMLA representative claimed, “fall clothes are very, very exciting because California’s designing talent has exerted itself hard in the face of restrictions.”⁵³ In August 1942 another expressed: “L-85 couldn’t take away – that little extra something that California has to give.”⁵⁴ With these words, the California fashion industry continued to wage, in the words of the *Wall Street Journal*, the “stylish battle” with the city of New York.⁵⁵ The Nazi occupation of France, and the loss of that city as an international source of fashion leadership, led to increased competition between New York and Los Angeles for wartime and postwar fashion status, for reputation and for market shares. Editorial content in *California Stylist* reflected the

⁵² Cohen, 69.

⁵³ “Fall Trends from California,” *California Stylist*, May 1942, 12.

⁵⁴ “Stylists Says Watch These Trends” August 1942, 27.

⁵⁵ Edgar W. Nassauer, “California Clothes,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 6, 1944.

newly reinvigorated efforts on the part of the latter. The AAMLA thus proudly asserted their belief that “California probably boasts of more original designers than the rest of the world combined.”⁵⁶ What they really meant was California had more original designers than New York.

More specifically, *California Stylist* asserted that their state was manufacturing exactly what women needed on the homefront of the nation at war. Functional, stylish sportswear, the type of clothing perfect for the active California lifestyle, the AAMLA asserted, allowed women to do all they needed to do for the war effort. They could volunteer with relief efforts, plant vegetables in their victory gardens, or run salvage drives for scrap metal without worry about ruining their impractical (New York) designed dresses. In April 1943, the president of the AAMLA, Harold Myer declared, “our manufactures today are creating, and will continue to create, clothes that are more practical, more comfortable, more in keeping with the demands of war-busy women.” He continued: “the sort of clothes that can only come from California.”⁵⁷ Individual advertisements carried the same message, although quieter. One for the Marjorie Montgomery Company featured a “casual jacket with skirt or slack” that was “cut to the order of American women,” “in demand now and for the duration.” Another for Marjorie’s Things marketed an “indispensible dress” that was “tailored” for the “active lifestyle.”⁵⁸ As previously noted, individuals on the homefront oftentimes struggled to

⁵⁶ “What’s Happening in California,” *California Stylist*, February 1942, 17.

⁵⁷ “Fall Market Week Scheduled June 20-23” April 1943, 25.

⁵⁸ Marjorie Montgomery Company, *California Stylist*, July 1942, 19; Marjorie’s Things, *California Stylist*, June 1943, 32.

embrace war-induced sacrifices: to save instead of spend, to conserve instead of waste. This was joined by the struggle to embrace war work, broadly defined as active participation in the war effort. Savvy businesses, again, understanding these conflicting impulses, presented the consumer with leisure spending reconstrued as a necessary, appropriate shopping. Consumers purchased the clothing they “needed” to participate in the war effort, simultaneously both accepting some and rejecting other government propaganda campaigns: accepting the call to participation, rejecting anti-inflation conservations campaigns.

The AAMLA further asserted that in addition to being perfectly suited to active wartime lifestyle, California sportswear was inspired by the war itself. Sylva Weaver, the fashion editor of the *Los Angeles Times* whose articles were frequently featured in *California Stylist*, asserted in June 1943 that California was prepared to accept the challenge of wartime restrictions because “the playground” of California had “gone to war.” She continued, explaining the reasons why she believed designers here were “best prepared” to “express the wartime needs of America”:

They watch hundreds of thousands of women go to work. They watch men and women relax off-work hours. They see gay dances of soldiers and sailors and marines, back from the Southwest Pacific. They have adopted the color and functionalism which have always characterized California clothes to the sharp simplicity of the war.

Situated at the center of U.S. defense production, in the state “bristling with bayonets over its hillsides” and “filled to the skies with shining planes,” California designers,

according to Weaver, unlike their counterparts in New York, were prepared to handle the challenges of the wartime market.⁵⁹

Safety with Glamour: Stylized Factory Apparel

“California, land of sunshine and sportswear specifically adapted for war workers use,” so declared the introduction of a six page advertorial for the aforementioned California Victory Garments, Inc. Five individual advertisements followed, respectively, for the “Blue Ribbon Slacks,” the “Knit-Fit Slacksuit,” the “Lady-Lieutenant Slacksuit,” the “Lumber-Jack Slacksuit,” and the “Jumper.” The first, as previously discussed, featured California slacks redesigned for “factory or office efficiency.” “Selected for safety and freedom of action,” the second was one-piece slacksuit created for light industrial labor. “Smart and trim,” the third was a slacksuit intended for use in offices and tool rooms. The fourth, the “heavy duty favorite,” intended for use by those on the assembly line because of its sturdy fabric, was a slacksuit that remained a “promotable combination of style and utility.” For the “eternal feminine” uncomfortable in bifurcated garments, the forth was a “trim-looking dress for office and stockroom efficiency.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Sylva Weaver, “The Fashion Industry Cuts a New Pattern,” *California Stylist*, June 1943, 129.

⁶⁰ California Victory Garments, Inc,” *California Stylist*, January 1943, 27-31. The Spring Market Week of the AAMLA, an event used to demonstrate what was new and different in fashion trends and to provoke the largest sales response, presented women’s work clothing “approved for style and safety by official regulatory boards in major plants.” Viewers of collections looked in approval at “complete slack ensembles with trimly tailored jackets, slim-fitting trousers, with matching blouses and perky hats,” and “beautifully styled tool aprons” with “more than a tinge of glamour added to its utility.” “Manufacturers Show War Workers’ Uniforms during Spring Market Week,” *California Stylist*, February 1943, 37,

In November 1942, the War Production Board placed a priority rating on women's work clothing to ensure that 100 million yards of cotton and spun rayon would be used to keep 7 million female war workers would be dressed for their labor.⁶¹ Deprived of unlimited access to necessary raw materials and fearing a resulting loss of revenue, some sportswear manufactures, like the ones who sponsored California Victory Garments, began designing and marketing women's work clothes.⁶² Instead of simply producing utilitarian garments, however, these once creators of fashionable ready-to-wear played to their own strengths, designing factory apparel with elements of style reminiscent of pre-war and wartime sportswear collections in order to stimulate demand. Their reasons for doing so were simple. An estimated nineteen million women worked for wages between the year 1942 and 1945, and five million of these had not been in the workforce before the war.⁶³ Women who had worked before the war, moreover, earned more in the flush wartime economy. In the words of *Time* magazine, "girls who had worked as maids for room, board and peanuts found factory jobs at \$100-\$200 a month."⁶⁴ Sportswear manufactures thus saw the movement of women into the factories as a new and exciting lucrative business opportunity that needed to be capitalized on.

Even more so, these new workwear/sportswear designers understood, in the words of Melissa McEuen in her *Making Women, Making War: Femininity and Duty on the*

⁶¹ Edward J. Gleason, "Huge Cut Forecast for Civilian Cloth," *New York Times*, November 29, 1942.

⁶² "Overalls With Chic," *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1943

⁶³ Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out To Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 276.

⁶⁴ "New Rich, New Poor," *Time*, May 4, 1942, 16.

American Home-front, 1941–1945, that “the nature of the new American workplace challenged the nation of ideal womanhood” in the United State as it applied to middle-class women. She further demonstrates:

With many more women working, many more middle-class women doing dirty jobs heavy industry, and many more women of color earning higher wages than ever before, millions of potentially dangerous female bodies abounded. They posed dangers because they represented myriad forms of independence, economic, sexual, social, and ultimately, political.

She then illuminates how these potentially “disruptive forces” were defused with femininity in personal behavior and appearance, and how later advertising agencies “dealt with women’s entrance into business by recognizing the public’s potential apprehensions over it, then integrating these doubts into their client’s endorsements.”⁶⁵ Knowing that middle class women would be nervous in the traditional masculine garb of the slack, and knowing that they would face pressure to maintain feminine appearances on the factory floor, workwear/sportswear manufactures capitalized on anxieties by providing women with workwear with deliberate feminine detailing.⁶⁶

Feminized workwear with purposeful ornamental detailing thus “neutralized” women’s workwear, again borrowing the word from, McEuen, thereby allowed women to enter the factory with less criticism.⁶⁷ Designer, feminine workwear helped to ease tensions that developed as middle class women left the home to serve as workers because

⁶⁵ McEuen, 132 and 60.

⁶⁶ For a discussion of women’s insecurities wear slacks, see Eileen Boris, “Desirable Dress: Rosies, Sky Girls, and the Politics of Appearance,” *International Labor and Working Class History* 69 (2006): 123-142. Women also received much instruction in the popular press as to how to dress feminine while at work. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, women should wear slacksuits and long jackets to avoid “confessing” the presence of a “spare tire.” Sylvia Blythe, “Beauty in Denim,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1942.

⁶⁷ McEuen, 155.

appropriate dress signified continued gender compliance. Indeed, the pressure to remain gender compliant in the workplace remained high. McEwen explains how “messages abounded on how women could make themselves into the right kind of home-front fighter and streamlining their bodies appropriately.” Workwear/sportswear designers understood this, and knew how to capitalize on it.

To further stimulate demand for their products, the same sportswear/workwear designers marketed their garments as a requirement of women entering the industrial workforce, thereby again dissolving personal guilt brought upon by leisure spending facilitated by the defense economy itself by recasting it as work related. To help women workers achieve both “competence” and “confidence,” J.W. Robinson Co. thus offered the “‘right dress’ for war activities” (Figure 20). “Your friends, your family, your loved ones want you to look, feel your best on the job,” so declared an advertisement for Broadway’s War Worker’s Shop.⁶⁸

To entice the millions of working-class women who had worked before the war to purchase their garments, the Los Angeles fashion community used other strategies. Knowing that a new class of potential shoppers had finally money to spend, the management of former “snotty stores,” also in the words of *Time*, also “ordered a relaxation of snide sales approaches” and began “directing their advertising plumb at

⁶⁸ “Gifts for Women in War Work,” Broadway, *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 1942. Research compiled by Melissa McEuen supports this assertion. “In an environment permeated by questions of opportunity and patriotic duty,” she argues, “American advertisers played on consumer’s doubts and anxieties. (10) She explains how the makers of Tampax informed women that they needed to take care when wearing feminine hygiene products in formfitting slacks, thereby capitalize on insecurities and increasing demand for their products (152).



With utmost competence—and confidence—you pursue the cause in which you serve, correctly outfitted in clothes that suit the task. Whether as a volunteer, or somewhere on the long production line you've found your vital "niche," Robinsons' are ready with wide and varied selections of the clothes you're wanting now. These are some of the wartime organizations which Robinsons' is privileged to serve:

Figure 20
J.W. Robison, Co (detail), *Los Angeles Times*

plebeians.” Detroit’s Saks Fifth Avenue thus invited the General Motors Girls’ Club to a fashion show. Back in Los Angeles, as previously noted, Bullocks Wilshire and Bullocks Downtown enticed the war-created nouveau riche into their stores with patriotic windows and display counters. Strategies proved successful, and many purchased garments they previously would have been unable to afford: again according to *Time*, “\$37 dresses, \$85 coats.”⁶⁹

By marketing themselves as an appropriate destination for all women regardless of class, Bullocks Wilshire and other high-end department stores in effect encouraged working-class women to envision themselves different. They were now women capable of purchasing expensive clothing and luxurious accessories alongside their middle-class counterparts. Regardless of the fact that the evidence does not suggest this was done for reasons other than economics, the department stores themselves accepted that the war had brought them a new clientele, and that this was a fantastic economic opportunity.

To further entice both working and middle-class consumers, California Victory Garments connected themselves with the famous easy style of sand and surf embodied in California sportswear, and hopefully spurred demand, by emphasized that their workwear was inspired by the Golden State itself in terms of color, silhouette, and design: indeed, their very name “California Victory Garments, Inc.” did the same. The “Lady Lieutenant Slack Suit,” as described above, allegedly retained “California dash” in its “fitted waist” and “crisp lines.” Hi-Style of California, a second company, offered a

⁶⁹ “New Rich, New Poor,” *Time*, May 4, 1942, 16.

California Styling—
Tailored Tribute to Women at War

SURGE FORWARD
A SPUN RAYON FABRIC
CONTAINING SOLTECA EASTMAN CRIMPED ACETATE RAYON
REGISTERED TRADE MARK

CIVILIAN PERSONNEL Uniform . . . trim, becoming, with the authentic accent of California smartness . . . as approved for Army, Navy or Marine bases and depots . . . for the thousands of women working in direct conjunction with the armed forces. Its serviceman's tailoring, to the perfection of California standards, has the official smile of approval.
Handsome, practical, durable SURGE FORWARD, A Reltex Fabric by Reliable.
In blue. Sizes 10 to 20. No. 813 . . . \$13.75 3/10 e.o.m.

HI-STYLE OF CALIFORNIA

722 S. LOS ANGELES ST.
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
833 MARKET STREET
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.

Figure 21
 Advertisement for *Hi-Style of California* (detail)
California Stylist, January 1943
 Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

“trim” and “becoming” civilian personnel uniform with the “authentic accent of California smartness,” their “tailored tribute to women at war.”⁷⁰ (Figure 21)

In order to further blur the lines between workwear and sportswear, and thereby further establish the style credentials of the latter, workwear/sportswear designers informed female consumers that industrial workwear could be worn as sportswear. California Victory Garments, for one, informed female war workers that they should feel “proud” to wear their garments “en route to work, on the job, [and] for leisure too.” Buffums Long Beach advertised Western Industrial Fashions that could be worn “for work, going to work, [and] playing after work.”⁷¹ Department stores across the city further encouraged women to think along the same lines. Both Bullock’s Wilshire and Bullock’s Downtown placed their war worker’s shops next to their sportswear departments, in both cases because women in less technical fields could wear sportswear to work. In the opinion of the AAMLA, this constituted a “clever bit of merchandising,” and an example which others could follow.⁷²

Sportswear thus became another component of the “stylish battle” waged between California and New York for wartime fashion dollars.⁷³ Sylva Weaver, again battling for California fashion, asserted in the *Los Angeles Times* that “simple” California sportswear “fit right into the factory production line,” specifically mentioning slacksuits, jumper

⁷⁰ Hi-Style of California, *California Stylist*, January 1943.

⁷¹ California Victory Garments, Inc., *California Stylist*, January 1943, 27-31; Buffums’ Long Beach, *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 1942.

⁷² “Sold American!,” *California Stylist*, March 1943, 39.

⁷³ Edgar W. Nassauer, “California Clothes,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 6, 1944.

overalls, jumper dresses, and three-piece outfits (i.e. matching jacket, slacks, and skirt).⁷⁴ The same newspaper later reported: “work clothes are cut with the sure approach of the movie designer’s scissors, the swanky lines of the best-looking sportswear California has brought forth.”⁷⁵ The ever present underlying message was the same. California manufacturers, both Weaver and the paper implied, produced better workwear than their counterparts in New York.

.....

Even before the coming of war to the United States, the two sections of the Los Angeles fashion industry, meaning both the California sportswear designers with their ready-to-wear separates and the Hollywood film studios with their licensed merchandise, came together in cooperation. Indeed, the usually competitive studios put aside their differences and worked in tandem in order to present a united front. “Reversing the usual method of originating fashion trends,” the “trial and error in secret procedure,” according to the *Los Angeles Times*, moreover, “six noted Hollywood motion picture designers sat down together, discussed and sketched, sketched and discussed, and then worked with manufacturers to originate California’s 1941 trend for coats and suits for fall.” The Los Angeles Coat and Suit Manufacturers, a collective of manufactures, then picked twelve of

⁷⁴ Sylva Weaver, “Buyers Flock to Fashion Shows Here,” *Los Angeles Times*, January, 23, 1943.

⁷⁵ “Women’s Activities: Working Women Given Styles with Glamour,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 1943

the collaborative designs and manufactured them, later presenting the resulting coats and suits to the fashion consuming public at the Biltmore Hotel on July 14, 1941. Ad Zalkus, the president of the manufacturers group, believed that such cooperation would be mutually beneficial for the entire industry. “With this added prestige and promotion,” he believed, the California fashion industry could encourage more women in the United States to purchase California-designed, California-manufactured coats instead of those of the competition, the competition meaning New York. Soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor, on December 30, 1941, the Los Angeles fashion community prepared for the coming of summer with swim suits designed by leading Hollywood costume designers. “Combining the creative talent of seven Hollywood film designers with the ingenuity of manufacturing creators,” potential shoppers were treated with one and two-piece swim suits, many of which were designed in patriotic red, white, and blue.⁷⁶ In the context of the “stylish battle,” members of the California fashion community started to believe that it would be better for all involved if more women across the United States purchase California fashion regardless of who designed it. Competition, importantly, would only hurt the industry as a whole, hindering the city’s ability to emerge as the new fashion capital of the United State

⁷⁶ Sylva Weaver, “New Fashion Trends Starts,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 12, 1941; Sylva Weaver, “Colorful Swimming Suits Displayed at Fashion Show,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 30, 1941.

Chapter Three:

The Mosquito Netting Gown: Costume Restrictions and Fashion Publicity in Wartime Hollywood

The film *Casablanca* (1943) by Warner Bros. tells the tale of American expatriate, Rick Blaine, played by Humphrey Bogart, and his former flame, Isla Lund, played by Ingrid Bergman. The two reunite in Morocco at Rick's Café Américan, a nightclub frequented by exiles attempting to escape Europe, several years after Isla has mysteriously failed to meet and runaway with Rick. Isla and her new husband Victor Laszlo, the Czech underground leader, seek letters of transit out of Casablanca, something that Rick has in his possession. In an attempt to take the letters by force, Isla confronts Rick with a gun. This continues into the culminating scene when the two realize their love for each other, and they embrace, and passionately kiss. The film famously concludes with Rick sacrificing his relationship with Isla for patriotic reasons. Isla leaves Casablanca with Victor so she can help him with his important work.

Even before the film's release, Warner Bros. began publicizing the work of chief costume designer, Orry-Kelly, focusing on the changes he made for the sake of the war effort. A newspaper article in the *Los Angeles Times*, likely the result of a studio press release, praised the designer's avoidance of the scarce resources of wool and silk, enthusiastically declaring that *Casablanca* was an "All-American," "All-Cotton"



Figure 22
Publicity images of Ingrid Bergman (Isla Lund) in *Casablanca* (Warner Bros., 1942); costumes designed by Orry-Kelly (a.k.a. Orry George Kelly)

production.¹ Upon the occasion of the film's premiere, Warner Bros. proudly announced that the costumes created were entirely L-85 compliant, "without wasted pins, unnecessary zippers, or real silk."² Orry-Kelly's creation for *Casablanca* indeed remained streamlined, and in fact, represented a departure from the costumes as proposed in the original screenplay (Figure 22). Instead of wearing "evening formal attire," as listed on the wardrobe plot, Isla wore a simple two-piece dress of white cotton when she entered the Café Américan to be reunited with Rick.³ Isla's simple dress reflected her understanding of war as a time in which people should act according to their morals, and a time without unnecessary extravagances. Indeed, as *Casablanca* worked to press forward its larger point about the importance of sacrifice in times of war, they simultaneously suggest the importance of simplified fashion. Bergman herself, her very body, becomes the canvas on which to articulate this particular version of patriotism.

While highlighting the costumes' war appropriateness, the "exploitation" department further praised the costumes' fashionability. Promotional articles in the press book for use on the "women's page" of newspapers across the country informed women that they could dress smartly like Bergman.⁴ After noting that Orry-Kelly needed to

¹ Read Kendall, "Hollywood Notes," *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1942.

² Press Release: "No Ration on Love: Hollywood keeps pace with real life with speed-up of romancing." Warner Bros. Archives, University of Southern California, *Casablanca* Collection.

³ Alijean Harmetz, *The Making of Casablanca: Bogart, Bergman, and World War II* (New York: Hyperion, 2002), 168.

⁴ Studio publicists created motion picture press books in order to provide newspapers with pre-written content that could be easily published to encourage people to purchase film tickets. They contained articles that provided suggestions for cross-promotional activities that could be used by movie theaters, department stores, and other businesses. They also publicized descriptions of film costumes to encourage women themselves to see Hollywood motion pictures as a source of fashion inspiration. The articles, along with

create “almost tropical clothing” given the fact that the film was set in the deserts of Morocco, the article asserted that the designs could be easily adapted for the fall or winter ready-to-wear seasons by the use of darker colors and warmer fabrics⁵ (Figure 21).

The year before the release of *Casablanca*, Paramount Pictures released *The Palm Beach Story* (1942), a romantic comedy starring Claudette Colbert and Joel McCrea. The film tells the story of newlyweds Gerry and Tom Jeffers, and their marital problems concerning household finances. After a huge argument, Gerry suggests to Tom that he should let her find a wealthy man to help them out, something “a long legged gal can do without anything.” Gerry decides to leave her husband in New York City to find herself a new man in Palm Beach, Florida. En route, she meets the millionaire John D. Hackensack who takes her on a lavish shopping spree. Tom then follows Gerry to Palm Beach to try to win her back. When the two men meet accidentally, Gerry announces that Tom is her brother, and convinces John to finance one of Tom’s money-making schemes. In the end, unsurprisingly, Gerry cannot let John give Tom money, and she and her husband reunite.

publicity stills, were provided to the theaters free of charge, which could in turn pay for their publication in local newspapers.

⁵ “*Casablanca* Styles Easily Adaptable” in Warner Bros. Press Book for *Casablanca*. Warner Bros. Archives, University of Southern California, Casablanca Collection. The fashion publicity campaigns created for *Casablanca* were part of the larger program of patriotic publicity launched by Warner Bros. and aimed to further exploit the patriotic content of the film itself. Indeed, the studio press book suggested that communities utilized the film to help publicize war bond and scrap salvage drives. Suggested slogans for the campaigns included: “Your scrap metal was in the bombs and tanks and guns that captured CASABLANCA! Keep it coming!” “Tie in Title with Salvage Drive,” Warner Bros. Press Book for *Casablanca*. Warner Bros. Archives, University of Southern California, Casablanca Collection.



Figure 23

Film still of Claudette Colbert (Gerry Jeffers) in *The Palm Beach Story* (Paramount Pictures, 1942); costumes designed by Irene (Irene Lentz).

Claudette Colbert as Gerry wore fantastic costumes designed by Irene Lentz, who was simply known as “Irene.” These costumes, very unlike Bergman’s simple and somewhat modest cotton dresses, remained blatantly sexy as demanded by the storyline. One particularly form-fitting silk dress highlighted Colbert’s feminine attributes with deliberately placed gathering at the breast and pelvic regions (Figure 23). Publicity materials in the press book capitalized on the talents on Irene, and did so without referring the war. Indeed, the Office of War Information requested that all mentions of the war be stripped from the film in order to make sure that people did not think it was happening in wartime.⁶ In one advertisement, created to entice potential female viewers to see the film, Colbert is shown in four examples of fashionable dress used throughout the film, pieces that reflected the various lines found in a department store from casual to fancy: an “Arrival Suit,” a “Sports Suit,” a “Dinner Dress,” and an “Evening Gown” (Figure 24).

The advertising and promotional campaigns for both films expose how in the midst of the Second World War, Hollywood was concurrently marketing fashion in two very different ways. The advertisement for *The Palm Beach Story* reveals how Paramount Pictures was still marketing fashion in the manner they had developed in the 1930s as described in chapter 2 of this dissertation. Colbert, working as a “clotheshorse,”

⁶ Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 91-93.

The Palm Beach Fashion Story



Figure 24
"The Palm Beach Fashion Story," Paramount Pictures Press Book for *The Palm Beach Story*.

was effectively selling, with the help of the press book, film-inspired fashion by being seen on the silver screen in glamorous clothing. The publicity for *Casablanca*, with its focus on fabric conservation and L-85 compliance, demonstrates, conversely, that Warner Bros. had found a new, profitable way to sell fashion in the context of the hyper-patriotic environment that was homefront U.S.A. The studios used the rhetoric of fashion frugality, created by the federal government for their own purposes, namely as means to market their costumes as patriotic.

The pre-war Hollywood prerogative of creating decadent, extravagant pictures exclusively without regards to costs could not be maintained in the opinion of the federal government. Roughly eighty million Americans, two-thirds of the population, went to the movies at least once a week, where they remained a captive audience.⁷ Movie-watching remained throughout the war a favored leisure activity of the American people. Given this, coupled with the perceived power of Hollywood as a shaping cultural institution, the Office of War Information (OWI) and the War Production Board (WPB) each sought to harness the motion picture as an instrument of war, transforming the motion picture from simple entertainment into entertaining propaganda. The OWI believed that citizens would remain receptive to propagandistic messages of their choice if they were transmitted to them through movie pictures. As director of the OWI Elmer Davis suggested, “the easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people’s mind is to let it go in through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize

⁷ Koppes and Black, 1. For a discussion of the OWI and predecessor agencies, see Koppes and Black.

they are being propagandized.”⁸ Consequently, they urged the studios to make a concerted effort to produce films and create associated publicity campaigns that followed the “Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry” by embodying the wartime ethos in terms of promoting homefront volunteerism, investment in war bonds, female war work, cooperation across class lines, cheerful sacrifice, and military service for both men and women. “Show democracy at work,” the OWI declared, “in the community, in the factory, [and] the army.”⁹ Similarly, in order to encourage national acceptance of streamlined fashion, the WPB applied L-85 to film costume.

In response to these urgings, combined with the need to maintain face and remain relevant to a wartime audience, the studios complied and soon realized that compliance meant fantastic profits. The patriotic female centered wartime drama had become a logical, lucrative means to sell patriotic chic, war-inspired fashion. In accordance with the established wartime pattern of patriotic advertising and public relations pioneered so aptly by the designers of California ready-to-wear, the studio found ways to promote the war effort all the while promoting their own interests.

Simultaneously, as demonstrated by film *The Palm Beach Story*, demand for escapist motion pictures, coupled with the fear that the industry was over saturating the market with patriotic rhetoric, led to the release of musicals, westerns, and romantic

⁸ Koppes and Black, 64.

⁹ More specifically, the OWI through their Bureau of Motion Pictures used the “Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry” and its seven questions to help the studios determine if a movie would “help win the war.” See *Ibid.*, 65-70.

comedies alongside homefront melodramas and wartime combat films.¹⁰ Perhaps such films had become more culturally palatable because the studios had demonstrated their commitment to the war with other pictures. In the cases of these films, publicity programs continued with business as usual, such as in the case of the above described advertisements featuring Claudette Colbert.

By producing serious homefront dramas that educated consumers on proper wartime behavior in conjunction with frivolous fashion pictures, and by marketing L-85 compliant costumes as well as glamorous fashions that were also bound by restrictions, the Hollywood studios survived, perhaps even thrived through the war. They fulfilled the wishes of the federal government by assisting with its propaganda program, and also fulfilled the demands of the general public for film escapism. They provided inspiration for those interested in following Hollywood-inspired fashion trends, whetted appetites for continued (though restrained) consumption, and also importantly demonstrated to women how they could dress patriotically in L-85 compliant styles. They promoted the war effort, and did so openly for reasons of public relations, while simultaneously promoting their own interests and securing their own profit margins.

The Hollywood studios, which once embodied modern corporations with their glamorous films and synergetic fashion tie-ins, had been transformed for the duration. Instead of being that ultimate creator of desire, that director of worldwide fashion, they became curious cultural hybrid, born entirely out of the war: the source of entertaining propaganda and the entity that would help Americans navigate the new consumption

¹⁰ Doherty, 181-184.

terrain. In doing so, the Hollywood studios mobilized their leading ladies including Ingrid Bergman, Claudette Colbert, and Lana Turner in their motion pictures just as they had also mobilized them in their real lives through bond tours and other patriotic activities. These actresses were put forth as role models of proper wartime behavior, or, as suggested by the historian Robert Westbrook, they were put forth as women “men would be proud to protect.”¹¹ Even more so, the Hollywood studios with the backing of the federal government used the very bodies of their actresses and the costumes put upon them as the means of promoting homefront femininity and responsible female war work.

M-G-M’s Nail Straightener and Paramount’s Salvaged Wood: Material Conservation and Public Relations

As the United States rushed to mobilize, its war machine required an ever growing amount of raw materials, and many of the materials needed by the army or navy were crucial to the production of Hollywood films. Before the war, the film studios consumed 20,861,578 feet of lumber, 5,723,596 feet of composition board, 850 tons of iron and steel, and 153,807 reams of paper per calendar year.¹² In the face of possible shortages, the federal government decided that Hollywood film studios would bear the burden of going without. They demanded that studios change practices and find substitutes, believing that the needs of the military remained the nation’s priorities.

¹¹ Westbrook, 84.

¹² “Hollywood Studios Have 7,600 Priority Problems,” *Motion Picture Herald*, February 28, 1942. HLCF

In response, the studios, fearing that they would be dubbed “non-essential,” rushed to patriotically, voluntarily, cooperatively, and eagerly conserve.¹³ Through the auspices of the Association of Motion Picture Producers, the studios chose to take steps by their own volition to conserve critical raw materials.¹⁴ They formed the Materials Conservation Committee and the Film Conservation Committee. The first worked to coordinate conservation measures and set policies, and to serve as a watch dog by monitoring what materials went into the studios, and how these were used. The second worked strictly to conserve stocks of raw film.¹⁵ They also announced a voluntary, industry-wide ban on movie studio alteration and additions, and vowed to cooperate with each other in cases of equipment damage.¹⁶

Significantly, this rush to be cooperative might have instead been a rush to *appear* cooperative.¹⁷ In order to prove their patriotism, and for reasons of good public relations, the Hollywood film studios proudly publicized all actions taken freely for the sake of the war effort. The studios thus re-cast federally mandated war related changes as voluntary patriotic contribution. Articles in fan magazines and newspapers described

¹³ Lingerman, 173.

¹⁴ Arch Reeve, Public Relations Committee of the Motion Picture Industry, Press Release dated September, Margaret Herrick Library, Motion Picture Association of America World War II Records, Miscellaneous Press Releases (Box 7)

¹⁵ “Studio’s Devise Substitutes for 19 Critical Materials,” *Motion Picture Herald*, June 13, 1942. HLCF “Ban New Studio Work, Changes,” *Variety*, June 8, 1942. HLCF; Arch Reeve (Public Relations Committee of the Motion Picture Industry), Undated Press Release. Margaret Herrick Library, Motion Picture Association of America World War II Records, Miscellaneous Press Releases (Box 7)

¹⁶ “Ban New Studio Work, Changes,” *Variety*, June 8, 1942. HLCF

¹⁷ Lindeman, 173.

actresses like Bette Davis happily serving food in the Hollywood Canteen, and actors like Jimmy Stewart willingly joining the armed forces¹⁸ (Figures 25). The industry at large purchased millions of dollars worth of war bonds, donated their time and equipment to the production of propaganda films, provided free copies of motion pictures to entertain troops abroad, and allowed their stars to donate their time for war bond rallies.¹⁹ The studio executives even mandated that film stars give up limousines, and instead, according to the *New York Times*, made them ride in “ordinary jitney buses” to shooting locations.²⁰ It would have been politically unwise for the studios to allow their stars to be seen acting extravagantly, especially since many expected Hollywood actors and actresses to act as role models for the proper wartime behavior. In the context of war, the Hollywood film studios found it necessary to change their public image. Out of a fear that they would become out of touch with their audiences who were actively engaged in war work, they publicly altered practices. Even as the studios allowed themselves to be molded by the imperatives of war, though, profits did not decrease. Indeed, the studios found that in serving the war effort they were in fact serving themselves.²¹

To supplement the voluntary measures, the federal government, through the War Production Board, further restricted the studios access to raw materials. Unprocessed film (raw film stock) made of cellulose, and used by the studios to record their movies,

¹⁸ For more information on the Hollywood Canteen, see Starr, *Embattled Dreams*, 166-169.

¹⁹ Lingerman, 175.

²⁰ “Film Studios Take Steps to Conserve War Materials -- Ann Harding Returns,” *New York Times*, June 7, 1942.

²¹ Starr, *Embattled Dreams*, 165-166.



Figure 25
Bette Davis at the Hollywood Canteen

was a basic component of gun powder; moreover, given the increased need for military and government propaganda films, less film could be used for recreational Hollywood feature films.²² Accordingly, the WPB's Limitation Order L-178 on Film, originally passed August 20, 1942, restricted its use and transfer. To maintain the status quo, the WPB asked the studios to alter their filming techniques: fewer retakes, test shots and scene takes and less filming experimentation.²³ In the words of Louis Upton of the WPB: "Keep to the essentials of the photographing of your pictures, for every foot of film you use is just that much gunpowder denied the warring forces."²⁴ In attempt to save even more film stock, the Film Conservation Committee suggested that screen credits be curtailed for the duration for a savings of 10,000,000 feet of film a year.²⁵

On May 7, 1942 Conservation Order L-41 on Construction placed a \$5,000 limit on new materials that could be used for sets.²⁶ This resulted in studios abandoning motion pictures mid-production, such as in the case of Twentieth Century-Fox's "The Night the World Shook." The film, based upon the novel "Eight Hundred Convicts March on Caraibo" by Stephen Wendt, according to the *New York Times*, portrayed "chaos and rebellion in an earthquake-stricken penal colony in Central America;"

²² Lindeman, 176.

²³ "WPB Limits Movies on Amount of Film," *New York Times*, September 18, 1942. HLCF

²⁴ "Industry Musts from WPB," *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 22, 1942. HLCF

²⁵ "Hollywood Studying Added Economies," *Motion Picture Herald*, July 25, 1942. HLCF; "Hollywood Counts the Pennies," *New York Times*, August 30, 1942. HLCF; "Screen News Here and in Hollywood," *New York Times*, June 13, 1942.

²⁶ "\$5,000 Limit Put on Movie Sets," *New York Times*, May 7, 1942; "Elaborate Movie Sets Banned in New WPB Order," *Washington Post*, May 7, 1942. The WPB later ruled (November 1943) that L-41 only applied to permanent outdoor sets. See Arch Reeve, Public Information Committee of the Motion Picture Industry, Press Release, November 18.

production was stopped for the duration because the “materials needed to build and wreck a sizeable city exceeded the WPB’s ceiling.”²⁷ Sets, once made of lumber and then burned, were carefully and painstakingly dismantled so that materials could be reclaimed and reused. In response, Twentieth Century Fox’s art director designed reusable sets with removable windows, doors, and fireplace that could be reconfigured to give the appearance of variety.²⁸

By June 1942, *Variety* reported that “more than 50 basic materials” used in film production were sacrificed for the war effort including steel, wrought iron, copper, bronze, asbestos, wool, felt, aluminum, alcohol, carbon tetrachloride, and wool.”²⁹ The following month, they declared that the studios reduced their overall consumption of vital materials by 41%: 90% reduction of rubber, 40% nails, 35% metals, and 30% of film.³⁰

The *New York Times* succinctly described the wartime changes felt around Hollywood:

The industry that once prided itself on its sublime disregard of costs, that complacently admitted tossing thousands around like pennies, now has become more frugal than a Dutch housewife and prouder of ten-cent savings than a schoolboy of a new bank. Hollywood headlines were made recently when Metro bought a nail straightener, when Bette Davis wore a \$6 dress for a party scene, when Paramount salvaged some second-hand lumber, when a Twentieth Century mail clerk suggested a way to curtail use of paper clips.³¹

²⁷ “Film Studios Take Steps to Conserve War Materials -- Ann Harding Returns,” *New York Times*, June 7, 1942.

²⁸ “Hollywood Counts the Pennies,” *New York Times*, August 30, 1942

²⁹ “50 Basic War Materials Saved by Film Industry,” *Variety*, June 16, 1942. HLCF

³⁰ “Prod. Reports 41% Savings in Vital War Materials,” *Variety*, July 17, 1942. HLCF

³¹ “Hollywood Counts the Pennies,” *New York Times*, August 30, 1942

This article embodies wartime Hollywood to a great extent by demonstrating how the film studios proudly and publicly took steps, with great fanfare, by their own volition, to reduce their use of critical raw materials. Indeed, straightening nails seems to be more of a publicity stunt than anything, and Bette Davis wore her six dollar dress in the same year that Claudette Colbert wore decadent, extravagant pieces designed by Irene.

V-ictory Neckline Dinner Dress: L-85 and Film Costume

Priscilla Lane, star of Universal's Frank Lloyd production, "Saboteur," highlights her V-ictory neckline dinner dress with a defense styled hair-do designed by Emily Moore. The back and sides swirl up from a smooth hairline into a high swoosh of soft curls back of the deep, pompadour wave which sweeps back from the forehead.

The above words appeared as the caption for a Universal Pictures publicity still of the actress Priscilla Lane for the film *Saboteur* (1942) (Figure 26). This image of Lane in her "v-ictory neckline," and her "defense style hair-do," was part of the larger fashion publicity program of press releases and press books designed by the studio in time of the film's release in order to capture the attention of potential female movie watchers.³² Indeed, the *Washington Post* published an article describing the fashion of *Saboteur*, likely the result of such a studio press release, in their paper of June 8, 1942. After proudly announcing that the costumes for *Saboteur* were the first film costumes created based upon the dictates of L-85, the article described the design innovations of Saltern in the wake of the application of government orders.

³² "Star's Wardrobe Reflects Trend," Universal Pictures Press Book for *Saboteur*, Margaret Herrick Library Core Collection.



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Figure 26
Publicity image of Priscilla Lane (Pat) for *Saboteur* (Universal Pictures, 1942); costumes designed by Irene Saltern.

Saltern created for Lane and the fashion consuming public at large (as the garments would soon be available in the coming ready-to-wear season) the “the furlough dress,” which essentially was an afternoon dress that was fancy enough for evening wear, and the “free action sleeve,” which consisted of an long-sleeved dress paired with a sleeveless coat. By so naming the “*furlough* dress,” Saltern implied that she had created what busy women needed on the homefront: a multi-service (and therefore frugal and practical) garment perfect for breaks in the active war lifestyle. Along the same lines, by designating her creation the “free action sleeve,” she proudly asserted the measures she had willingly (and patriotically) taken for reasons of fabric conservation. By first describing L-85 mandated changes for film costume, and then announcing that the same changes would be seen in real clothing, the article suggested to female consumers that Hollywood film costume designers, like California sportswear designers, were finding ways to create fashion in spite of government rulings, and that this would benefit everyone.

The caption for the publicity still and the article in the *Washington Post* both represent how Hollywood film studios began using the rhetoric of patriotic fashion in their publicity materials. This action, a voluntary choice on the part of the film studios, can be understood as part of the larger program of patriotic publicity launched by them with the purpose of connecting themselves, and their films, to the war effort. When faced with the inevitable of being forced to create costumes that complied with General Limitation Order L-85, as in the case of California ready-to-wear, the studios also decided that it would be both politically expedient and highly profitable for them to turn

this to their own advantage. In doing so, the film studios could demonstrate to the federal government and the general public that they were taking the war effort seriously. They could also hopefully capitalize on the public's patriotic sentiments, and provide them with the opportunity to purchase L-85 compliant fashion inspired by the motion pictures.

Unlike the cases of lumber and iron, the War Production Board had reasons to restrict film portrayals of fashion for more than simply reasons of conservation. As demonstrated in chapter two of this dissertation, many American women viewed Hollywood as a source of fashion inspiration, and the representatives of the federal government understood this. On April 20, 1942, the WPB decided to amend General Limitation Order L-85 so it would apply to contemporary film costume.³³ The primary reason behind this decision, importantly, was public relations, not fabric conservation. Unlike the case of actual women's clothing, where altering design would mean saving millions of yards of fabric, altering the design of film costume would only be a drop in the bucket. Moreover, the fact that the WPB chose not to apply L-85 to historical film costume further demonstrates that the rationale behind this decision was something other than fabric economy.

³³ "Contemporary film costume" meaning costumes for films set in contemporary times. Importantly, L-85 itself never specifically mentions contemporary film costume, and only specifically states that "historical costume for theatrical productions" was exempt. Only with this, and other collaborating primary sources, we can know that the WPB restricted film costume. One such piece of evidence is the above mentioned WPB pamphlet "Control without Regimentation," which noted "stage and film costumes are required by L-85 to create all modern clothing in keeping with the provisions of the order." Edith Head in her memoir *Edith Head's Hollywood* written jointly with Paddy Calistro further explains that the Hollywood "austerity campaign" was "meant to set an example for the public." Paddy Calistro and Edith Head, *Edith Head's Hollywood* (New York: Dutton, 1983), 50.

In the opinion of the WPB, film costume needed to change because it had the ability to affect consumer behavior. In times of peace, they believed, film costume designers could create wardrobes based upon the dictates of script for the sake of being fantastic without considering the costs in order to whet appetites for the continuous, frenzied consumption of fashion. In times of war, however, this could not continue. If pre-war costumes could inspire women in their search for beauty, wartime costume, they asserted, needed to inspire women to accept war induced sacrifice. In the words one WPB information pamphlet, wartime film costume needed to “advance, rather than retard, the spirit of L-85.”³⁴ In applying L-85 to contemporary film costume, the WPB hoped that they could encourage national acceptance of L-85. They hoped that if American women viewed compliant clothing on the silver screen that they would desire similarly designed clothing for use in their real lives. The actresses would be transformed, again borrowing the studio vernacular, as clotheshorses for the war. Ultimately, the WPB hoped that they could transform Hollywood from the ultimate creator of desire into the authoritative educator on proper wartime fashion.

In response to these developments, while the studios at large were proudly publicizing all of the efforts they were taking for the sake of the war effort in order to maintain good public relations, they allowed (perhaps even requested) their film costume

³⁴ *Control without Regimentation: The New L-85* (Washington, DC: War Production Board Division of Information, 1943), 51.

designers to do the same. Milo Anderson, Warner Bros. costume designer, thus noted in one press release:

I think all the Hollywood designers should accept war restrictions and regulations regarding clothes as not only a definite challenge, but that they should be even more careful in observance of government rules than other designers because of the wide influence of motion picture costumes on the feminine public. It is an opportunity to show the American woman what she can do to aid the general program of conservation of essential materials.

He continued by stating that film costume designers must avoid mimicking anything prohibited by L-85 to “obviate the possibility that our ingenuity is simulating forbidden details that will lead women to believe that they are permissible.”³⁵ Designer Orry-Kelly, also of Warner Bros, agreed with Anderson in a second studio press release. “Practicality is the major theme of styling during these wartime conditions,” he noted. “Any woman observing film styles has a right to feel that they are available to her as well as to the star who wears them.” Orry-Kelly then described the costumes he created for Ida Lupino for *The Hard Way* (1943), emphasizing as he did in the case of *Casablanca* that glamorous clothing could be created out of cotton (as opposed to silk): “I had a cotton print, which was an East Indian design of bright colors, stitched all over with gold thread. I used this for a pencil-slim skirt, which was draped at the front. I topped it with a fitted, long-waisted bodice of heavy white crepe.”³⁶ While Milo Anderson and Orry-Kelly both in actuality had no choice but to comply with L-85, their actions were recast by the studios as a patriotic response to difficult wartime conditions.

³⁵ Milo Anderson, Undated Warner Bros. Press Release (“From: Alex Evelove/Warner Bros. Studios/ Burbank, California/ By: Milo Anderson)

³⁶ Orry-Kelly, Undated Warner Bros. Press Release

While the studios publicized their efforts to remain L-85 compliant for reasons of patriotic public relations, they simultaneously informed American women that they could find assistance from Hollywood film costume designers and the leading ladies themselves in terms of how to navigate the new fashion environment and look beautifully feminine in the process. For the film *Cairo* (1942) starring Jeanette MacDonald, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's press book featured the article titled "Dressing for Victory," which both claimed L-85 compliance for the film, and then declared that the fashions presented would become the new "resort and summer styles" for female fashion consumers.³⁷ For the film *Her Cardboard Lover* starring Norma Shearer, M-G-M provided a full length article written also by Kalloch in which he declared that the war was going to "revolutionize" fashion. After declaring that all clothing would be changed due to the imperatives of fabric economy, he noted that his designers for Shearer costumes embodied what was needed by American women: simple clothing in dark colors that could withstand multiple trips to the dry cleaners.³⁸

In doing so, the studios, with the backing of the federal government, provided a role model of patriotic homefront fashion, just as requested by the WPB. Even more so, as Robert Westbrook smartly argues in *Why We Fought: Forging American Obligation in World War II*, Hollywood actresses helped articulate personal homefront obligations to the war effort. For men, pin-ups of women such as Betty Grable served as "representative women, standing in for wives and sweethearts." For women, the actresses

³⁷ "Dressing for Victory," M-G-M Press Book for *Cairo*, Margaret Herrick Library Core Collection.

³⁸ Kalloch, "Priorities and Predictions," M-G-M Press Book for *Her Cardboard Lover*, Margaret Herrick Library Core Collection.

served a very different purpose. By looking a photograph of Grable, by seeing one of her films, or by reading about her war work in a fan magazine, women were provided with an example of a woman who remained someone “men would be proud to protect.” In the continued words of Westbrook, Grable, for example, was “offered to women – especially working-class women – as a model of female virtue on the homefront.”³⁹ If they followed the example of their favorite actress by maintaining their feminine beauty in patriotic L-85 compliant clothing and by fully participating in the war effort, ordinary women themselves would become, the films and the government implied, worthy of the men who fought bravely overseas for them.

While the designers paid lip service to the press about the compliant clothing to encourage national L-85 obedience, in other cases, they worked to embellish their garments using techniques not feasible for mass production for the sake of appearances such as using items from the L-85 exemption list, which included silver, jet, crystal, bugle beads, and wood. The resulting costumes were glamorous, satisfying the aim of the designers and studio executives, and L-85 compliant, satisfying the demands of the WPB. Regardless, such costumes could not satisfy the larger goals of the WPB: encouraging national support of L-85. In these cases, the designers were following the letter of the law, but not its spirit.

Vera West created, for example, a sweet gown by for Deana Durbin in *The Amazing Mrs. Holiday* (1943) that featured crystal white beads appliquéd in the shape of a bird, as fitting for the sweet sexy Ruth who had just returned from China with a large

³⁹ Westbrook, 73-84.

number of needy orphans (Figure 27).⁴⁰ Irene (Irene Lentz) designed a matronly appropriate gown for Mary Astor in *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944) made with silk small silk leaves and satin buttons appliquéd onto a mesh base (Figure 28). She also designed a gown for Rita Hayworth for *You Were Never Lovelier* (1942) without ruffles, flounces, or Shirred details but with lace appliquéd onto a flesh colored foundation (Figure 29). At least in this case, the conservation of materials brought added sex appeal to the sensual Maria as played by Hayworth. In using a little less fabric, the costume, in turn, purposely revealed much more skin. Perhaps in this case, by mandating fabric conservation, L-85 inadvertently increased the sex appeal of fashion and film costume. Milo Anderson perhaps took the idea of appliquéeing materials to create an interesting look the farthest with his mosquito netting dress made for Irene Manning for *The Desert Song* (1943). Anderson took a pink silk satin slip and created a skirt with a nipped waist; he then placed a bodice in the form of a bikini top over, in his words, “cross-barred mosquito netting.” The resulting garment gave the sexy appearance of a bare midriff (Figure 30). This costume embodies wartime Hollywood to a great extent: an inventive, glamorous piece created with fabric economy in spectacular fashion that was publicized widely by the studio. Indeed, given Anderson’s choice of material, this piece was, without a doubt, a publicity stunt.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Vera West, “Fall Predictions.”

⁴¹ Sheri Chinen Biesen further argues in *Blackout: World War II and the Origins of Film Noir* that the “war-related scarcity of rationed materials” additionally “aiding the intended heightening of eroticism in wartime films.” She, for example, asserts that Lana Turner’s bare legs and exposed midriff in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946) “were both spicy and economical.” (131-2)



Figure 27: Publicity image of Deana Durbin (Ruth Kirke Holliday) for *The Amazing Mrs. Holliday* (Universal Pictures, 1943); costumes designed by Vera West.



Figure 28:
Film still of Mary Astor (Anna Smith) in *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1945); costumes designed by Irene Sharaff (a.k.a. Sharaff); Costume design sketch by Irene Sharaff (a.k.a. Sharaff)



Figure 29
Publicity image of Rita Hayworth (Maria Acuna) for *You Were Never Lovelier*
(Columbia, 1942); costumes designed by Irene (Irene Lentz)

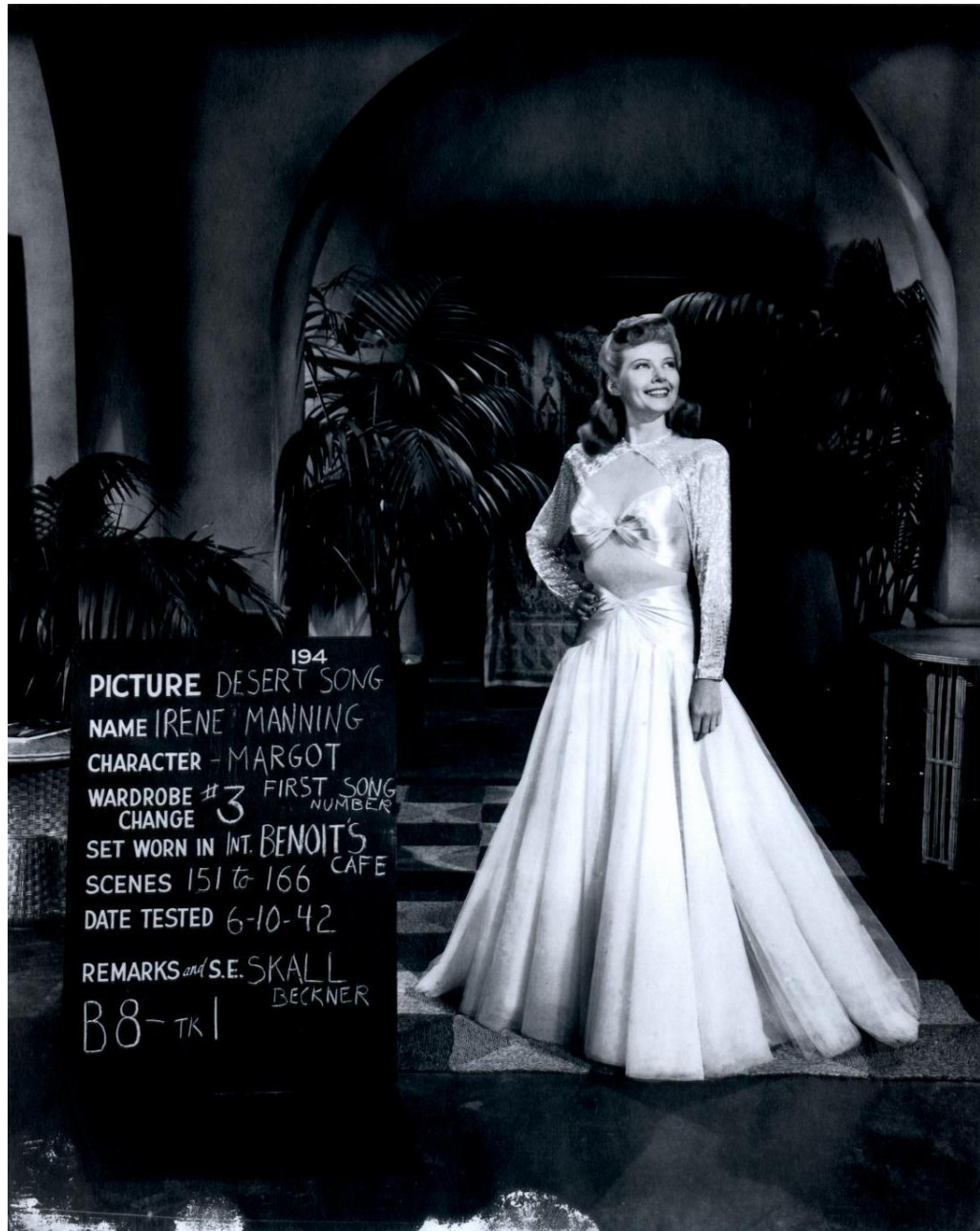


Figure 30
Costume test shot of Irene Manning (Margot) for *The Desert Song* (Warner Bros., 1944); costumes designed by Milo Anderson

The costume designers did not acknowledge the creation of commercially unfeasible costumes as problematic. Anderson's comments regarding the mosquito netting dress came in a press release describing the need for wartime economy, and his desires to inspire American women. Irene acknowledged that the methods she utilized were not practical for commercial use because of its expense, but stressed that wartime conditions necessitated creativity.⁴² Unlike the WPB who worked primarily towards material conservation, the Hollywood film studios still desired to make a profit, and still desired to wow fashion consumers with film costume reminiscent of the pre-war days to stimulate demand and rouse desire for wartime and postwar continued fashion consumption. By first describing the "patriotic" response of their fashions in terms of maneuvering around L-85, and then describing how costumes would become the basis for ready-to-wear, the studios came full circle. They fulfilled the government's wishes by giving American women the means to consume fashion in a patriotic war appropriate manner, and encouraged them to do so by harnessing the star power of their actresses, while still satisfying their own bottom lines by maintaining their position as an authority of style.

The studios, importantly, utilized the strategy of patriotic fashion promotions alongside traditional methods of fashion publicity that cannot be discussed in great detail here. For *Since You Went Away*, United Artists suggested that department stores utilize film stills in window displays of Shirley Temple, Jennifer Jones, and Claudette Colbert because the three women could represent the three available size categories of junior,

⁴² "MGM Studios Forced into Own Fabric Designing, Says Irene," *Women's Wear Daily*, April 27, 1945.

misses, and women's (Figure 31). Again, the presence of such diametrically opposite fashion publicity programs demonstrates how the Hollywood film studios managed the imperatives of wartime society. They promoted the interests of the federal government by providing American women with a source of fashion inspiration; they promoted the interests of themselves by doing what they needed to do to secure a profit.

Here's An Unusual Fashion Tie-Up!



Department stores and large ladies' ready-to-wear stores carrying Junior, Misses and Women's sizes should go for this unusual fashion tie-up on the Hilton family which is made up of just those three sized women.

Here they are: Junior, Shirley Temple; Misses, Jennifer Jones; Women's, Claudette Colbert.

With the number of good fashion stills available on these three stars (some of which with their still numbers, are shown in the layout and the still numbers of others are

listed below), it shouldn't be difficult to sell these stores on the idea of large window displays and newspaper ads displaying women's clothes in all three categories. This is particularly true in view of the importance of the picture, the magnitude of its stars and the great stir which it will undoubtedly make in the community. Fashion stills, other than those shown here, can be had by ordering Nos. CC66, CC91, CC92, CC81 for Colbert; Nos. JJX7, JJX10, JJX8, JJX5 for Jennifer Jones, and Nos. ST2, ST115, ST126, ST107(G), ST(B), ST39, STVP7 for Shirley Temple.

Figure 31
 "Here's An Unusual Fashion Tie-Up!," United Artists Press Book for *Since You Went Away*

The Fashionable War Film: Costume, Character Development, and Propaganda

Keep Your Powder Dry (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1945) begins in the bedroom of Valerie “Val” Parks, played by Lana Turner, who is still asleep at 2:00pm with a massive hangover. Her clothing, stockings, shoes, and other accessories are clearly shown in disorganized piles on the floor, the vanity, and the chair. After finally waking herself and making herself presentable, Val meets her lawyer, Avery Lorrison, to discuss her late grandfather’s estate. The lawyer informs her that she will not receive her money until she stops living extravagantly, and begins “conducting herself in a manner typical of the finest traditions of American womanhood.” Val questions what the lawyers would demand of her, joking that she could join the WACs or the WAVEs. Lorrison believes that would be a fantastic idea, and encouraged her to join the WACs. Valerie then decides that she would join just to receive the money, and then feign some kind of illness to get out of the service.

Val meets a large group of WAC recruits at the train station on her induction day, and her clothing stands out. She wears a fashionable suit, a fur over one shoulder, and high heeled shoes; the others wear simple, tailored, conservative suits and low heels. The impracticality of Val’s shoes is further highlighted when another WAC recruit, Leigh, stares at her feet in disbelief. To make this matter even clearer, the heel of Val’s

shoe breaks just as she meets one of her commanding male officers, who tells her: “we’ll see that you get sturdier shoes” (Figure 32).⁴³

With time, Val begins to embrace the army life, and take pride in her army issued uniform: she becomes visibly angry when others disrespect it. During a reunion with a group of her friends who trick her into leaving the base for a hotel, her army-issued hat is stolen by Junior Vanderheusen, who takes it and sits on it. Val becomes outraged: she lectures the group, saying that they need to become more informed with news and take up their responsibilities in terms of the war effort. Junior then takes Val’s hat again, and Val rips her sleeve as she tries to take it back. Junior spills a drink on Val’s uniform, and throws her hat out of the window, which lands on a taxi that drives away. Val storms out of the room. She leaves behind her now former friends, and by extension, her former carefree lifestyle.

As shown by the above described scenes, *Keep Your Powder Dry* utilized costume in order to symbolize Val’s personal evolution: from a high-class, self-centered woman concerned only with having fun to a serious WAC who understood her part in the war effort. Indeed, costumes and the bodies of the actresses themselves were repeatedly utilized in similar female centered wartime dramas – including *Since You Went Away* (United Artists, 1944) and *So Proudly We Hail* (Paramount Pictures, 1944) – in order to make this point for female characters transitioning into active war participation, military

⁴³ Figure 16, an M-G-M publicity still found at the Margaret Herrick Library, perfectly demonstrates how the film was using fashion in order to say something about Valerie’s personality.



Figure 32
Film stills of the cast of *Keep Your Powder Dry* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1945);
costumes supervised by Irene (Irene Lentz)

or civilian.⁴⁴ Because they understood the influence yielded by Hollywood, the U.S. government requested that feature films reinforce propaganda campaigns encouraging the social acceptance of women's changing wartime roles.⁴⁵ In doing so, again citing the work of historian Robert Westbrook, the studios, with the backing of the federal government, presented their leading ladies as examples of women worthy of protection.⁴⁶ By remaining beautifully feminine even while doing important war work, the film implied, Val and her fellow WACs remained, again in the words of Val's lawyer, women who upheld the "finest traditions of American womanhood," something which all women needed to be.

Val Parks, Leigh Rand, and Ann Darrison are shown as three women from varying socioeconomic backgrounds who eventually come together, and put aside their differences, for the sake of the war effort in a celebration of social harmony across class lines, just as requested by the OWI in their government manual.⁴⁷ Val, the stereotyped high-class snob, initially acts as though she is too important for war work. With time, however, even she understands the error of her ways and happily gives up her decadent lifestyle, even encouraging others to do the same. The film's underlying message

⁴⁴ The phrase "female centered home wartime dramas" is used in this dissertation to refer to films which plots focus on either homefront issues (i.e. women's war work, waiting for spouse to return, dealing with homefront shortages, etc) or female military life (WAC or WAVE service).

⁴⁵ Koppes and Black explain that the Office of War Information's Bureau of Motion Picture's encouraged the studios to create motion pictures that supported the war effort through their "Government Information Manual on Motion Pictures." Specifically, according to the authors, the government encouraged the studios to create films that showed everyone participating in the war effort, particularly women becoming war workers and soldiers. Koppes and Black, 65-70.

⁴⁶ Westbrook, 84.

⁴⁷ Koppes and Black, 67

becomes clear: all women, indeed all Americans, even those from the upper classes, must do their part. *Keep Your Powder Dry* thus asserts that in the context of war, the upper-class women would be appropriately (and patriotically) dressed in uniforms of olive drab. She would be fittingly dressed exactly as women from lower classes, the uniform and the war effort leveling social distinctions once based on dress. Her privileged place in the social hierarchy which had once excluded them from paid employment outside the home was no longer relevant. In doing so, she would be participating in the creation of democracy at home all the while the nation was fighting for democracy abroad.

Keep Your Powder Dry thus effectively served as a living and breathing propaganda poster, hopefully also recruiting women into the armed forces. The movement of women into the WACs and other military branches made many uncomfortable, and as a result, WAC recruitment literature presented their organization as a safe haven for femininity. Idealized WACS in recruitment posters wearing lipstick and rouge demonstrated to the women of United States their government's commitment to traditional womanhood.⁴⁸ To further calm fears that women would appear masculine, the various branches of the military rendered female military uniforms feminine and allowed the continued use of cosmetics. The WAVEs (the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) commissioned Mainbocher, the French couturier who had recently relocated to New York, to design their uniforms. The USMCWR (the United States Marine Corps Women's Reserve) declared in recruitment

⁴⁸ McEuen, 36-41.

literature that female recruits should not worry about their uniforms because the color combination of red and green had been proven fashionable by Elsa Schiaparelli, the Parisian couturier, and the male Marine uniform had been adapted for female use so it would “flatter face and figure.” They promised their recruits, moreover, access to tailors to ensure that uniforms were fit properly. They even promised that the official Marine handbag had enough pockets “for both orders and cosmetics.”⁴⁹

M-G-M, urged forward by the Office of War Information, attempted a contribution to this government program with the film *Keep Your Powder Dry* effectively recruiting American women into the WACs by presenting the leading ladies of Hollywood in military uniform. While the WAC recruitment posters featured beautiful women with porcelain skin and painted lips, *Keep Your Powder Dry* offered the likes of Lana Turner looking positively glamorous in her G.I. issued army khakis (Figure 32).⁵⁰ The film indeed repeatedly stressed the continued beauty and femininity of the WACs. Even when serving as mechanics in the Motor Pool Detail Unit, these women keep their faces and their clothing relatively clean, and their hair under control. To make this point clearer, after a general receives efficient service on his automobile, he praises the beauty of the women: “Amazing! Such pretty girls too!” The very title of the film, “Keep Your Powder Dry,” in the context of the war, even contained a dual reference to both facial (cosmetic) and gun powder, further suggesting to the public that women could be

⁴⁹ McEuen, 43.

⁵⁰ McEuen further explains the use of feminine beauty in WAC recruitment posters. See McEuen, 53-40.

beautiful as soldiers.⁵¹ Moreover, by empowering women with masculine weapons of war, but then reinforcing and reasserting established gender roles with the feminine make-up, the film again calmed social tensions and reinforced the idea of war work as temporary.

Female centered wartime dramas as entertaining propaganda thus effectively recruited women into military service; calmed fears that women would appear masculine in military uniforms; and encouraged everyday sacrifice and war appropriate restraint in consumption, clothing and otherwise. In doing so, they used the very body of the actress as means to contest established gender norms considered out of step with the emergency of war. As demonstrated in chapter 2 of this dissertation, masculine workwear and military uniforms were “neutralized,” again borrowing the words of historian Melissa McEwen, by means of feminine detailing which signaled continued gender compliance. Lana Turner as a WAC remained the walking and talking embodiment of the propaganda posters, doing her part to encourage women to follow her lead and remain feminine while doing so (Figure 33).

Fashion publicity materials for the film supplemented this basic message, likely to the satisfaction of the U.S. government. In an article titled “From Glad Rags to Glory Clothes,” it was implied that if Lana Turner, Laraine Day, and Ann Darrison could give up wearing glamorous film costume for a movie, and still look fabulous doing so, then the average American could do the same. The article quoted Laraine Day as praising the

⁵¹ The title of the film comes from a longer phrase attributed to Oliver Cromwell in 1624: “put your trust in God, my boys, but mind to keep your powder dry.” For more information, see: William Safire, “Keep Your Powder Dry,” *New York Times*, February 23, 1997. In the 1940s United States, the phrase’s meaning shifted. As revealed in the 1944 Warner Bros. film “Janie” which featured the song by the same name “powder” was both facial (cosmetic) powder and gun powder.



Figure 33: “Good Soldier,” Women’s Army Corps Recruitment Poster and Film still, *Keep Your Powder Dry* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1945)



Figure 34
Publicity image for *Keep Your Powder Dry* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1945)

WAC uniforms fashionability, and declaring that women of the army were the “best dressed women of the day.”⁵² Publicity stills for the film furthered this point. Turner, Day, and Darrison are shown walking confidently in their uniforms. Just as argued by McEwen, their feminine curves are clearly shown in their well-tailored uniforms, and we can see that each wears lipstick. (Figure 34)

Publicity materials for *So Proudly We Hail* (Paramount Pictures, 1944) did the same for the U.S. Army Nurses Corps. In “New Wartime Hair Styles for Victory,” it was stressed that army regulation hairstyles did not detract from the feminine beauty of leading actresses Claudette Colbert, Veronica Lake, and Paulette Goddard.⁵³ (Figure 35) The film itself also forwards the same message. Lieutenants Joan O’Doul (Goddard), Rosemary Larson (Britton), and others recount their experiences in the field as nurses in the Philippines to a doctor who is trying to save the life of Lieutenant Janet “Davy” Davidson. Davidson seems to have lost her will to live because she believed her husband had been killed in action. The nurses described the hardships they endured, and the soldiers they met. As they do so, their clothing frequently is mentioned as the nurses describe the ways that they attempted to maintain their feminine appearances. When describing the Christmas Eve Party, the nurses tell of the creative measures they turned to in order to ensure they were able to dress smartly for the party. Barbara wears a white dress with a sash she created herself out of an “old surgical gown...dyed with

⁵² “From Glad Rags to Glory Clothes,” Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Press Book for *Keep Your Powder Dry*.

⁵³ “New War Hair Styles for Victory,” Paramount Pictures Press Book for *So Proudly We Hail*

New War Time Hair Styles for Victory



Figure 35
“New War Hair Styles for Victory,” Paramount Pictures Press Book for *So Proudly We Hail*.

mercurochrome.” Joan, wanting to impress “Kansas,” becomes the most inventive. She resorts to wearing a black nightgown over a black slip. Joan even takes her black nightgown into the field, and wears it every time she sleeps in order to keep her morale up. In doing so, she again focuses the viewer on the ways in which femininity could be reasserted within the context of war. Even on the battlefield, Joan, as a woman, *needed* the things that made her a woman, and nothing, even a war, could change that.

While *So Proudly We Hail* does acknowledge the importance of feminine appearances, it also firmly suggests that such concerns can and should be temporarily abandoned if the imperatives of war demand it. The nurses could not wear their white uniforms in the field because no laundry facilities were available, and consequently, they started wearing men’s coveralls, men’s shoes, and men’s underwear. When Rosemary receives a decorative hat from her parents back in the United States, another nurse declares: “who can eat a hat?” Joan’s obsession with her nightgown, something which she is constantly teased about by the other nurses, is ultimately shown as a liability. She runs back to her barrack to retrieve the nightgown during an aerial attack by the Japanese. These scenes can be taken as gentle instructions to those living on the homefront that excessive concern over outer appearances does not serve the interests of the war effort. Even more so, by showing Joan foolishly risking her life for a nightgown, the film suggested that ultimately women were not suited to the task of waging war.

Those on the homefront received additional instruction as to how they should behave from *Since You Went Away* (United Artists, 1944), which explored the challenges faced by the Hilton Family – Anne Hilton (the mother), Jane Hilton (the elder daughter),

and Bridget “Brig” Hilton (the youngest daughter) – as they learn to survive without their husband and father. The film repeatedly includes snippets that collectively demonstrate how the war changed American life, seemingly exactly following the suggestions provided in the government manual. From a steak house with no steak to the town’s grocer having difficulty maintaining his stocks (though he never resorting to the black market), we see characters handling shortages with patriotically accepting attitudes.⁵⁴ The film takes the opportunity to gently instruct the viewing public on proper wartime behavior, a move which was praised by the Office of War Information. After hearing a businessman complain to the train conductor that he was going to be late to an important meeting, a soldier with an amputated arm says, “I’ve got plenty of time from now on.” After hearing young European refugee say that she did not eat meat or milk after the Germans invaded, a well-dressed and portly American woman complains that it was “simply outrageous” that the train was only serving two meals a day.⁵⁵

As part of its larger instructional message, *Since You Went Away* utilized its costumes in order to demonstrate character’s relative commitment to the war effort. Emily Hawkins (played by Agnes Moorehead) is the selfish woman who hoards food and does not volunteer with the war effort, and always wears new clothing. (Figures 36) The Hilton family, conversely, dresses in old clothing. (Figure 37) The film clearly makes this point when the family is at church one Sunday. Emily notes condescendingly that Anne Hilton (played by Claudette Colbert) is still wearing a dress she purchas

⁵⁴ See *Hollywood Goes to War*, 157.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*



Figure 36
Film still of Agnes Moorehead (Emily Hawkins) in *Since You Went Away*



Figure 37
Film still of Jennifer Jones (Jane Hilton), Shirley Temple (Bridget "Brig" Hilton), and Claudette Colbert (Anne Hilton) in *Since You Went Away*.

years before. Anne responds diplomatically: “Yes, Emily, you are one woman who can be expected to maintain her standards in these times.”

Fashion publicity materials created by United Artists for the release of *Since You Went Away* convey the same instructional message with regards to clothing: that patriotic American woman should be able dress smartly with limited purchases of streamlined clothing. Claudette Colbert, one article declared, preferred “simplicity” in her clothing, “especially now with a war going on.” Her “basic wartime wardrobe” included “three suits that carry her along for practically every occasion, barring, of course, sports clothes and simple prints for the dog days.”⁵⁶

Female centered wartime dramas, and the fashion publicity materials created by the studios for the occasion of these films’ release, both forwarded the government program of encouraging female active participation in the war effort. Such films praised the spirit of female wartime volunteerism, calmed resulting social anxieties, and provided nudging towards film viewers considering taking a more active role themselves. They, moreover, subtly encouraging American women to see their clothing and themselves differently. In the cases of *So Proudly We Hail* and *Keep Your Powder Dry*, the female military uniform is presented as a viably feminine (and patriotic) option that should not be feared. In the case of *Since You Went Away*, restraint in terms of shopping is elevated as the proper thing to do, and, moreover, the thing that Claudette Colbert does.

⁵⁶ “Colbert Bases Wardrobe on Three Suit Changes,” United Artists Press Book for *Since You Went Away*.

The Office of War Information Overseas Bureau reviewed working scripts from the studios in order to determine whether or not the film would promote or hinder the U.S. war effort. They sharply criticized Paramount Pictures' *The Palm Beach Story* because it presented upper-class individuals allowing themselves "unbridled extravagance, fantastic luxury, childish irresponsibly and silly antics," which, in the opinion of the OWI, would likely "gladden Hitler's Heart." The OWI believed that if Americans saw their favorite actors and actresses behaving badly on the silver screen they would be more likely to behave badly themselves. Moreover, they feared that if the film was exported, international viewers would think the American people did not take the war effort seriously.⁵⁷

Script reviews were the natural complement to L-85 compliant film costume, and with both methods, the federal government, through the WPB and the OWI, attempted to transform motion pictures into entertaining propaganda. Twentieth Century Fox's *Kitten on the Keys* allegedly presented "the heroine buying gowns, evening slippers, cosmetics, perfumes" which would suggest abroad that Americans were "concerned solely with their personal affairs in wartime." Universal Pictures' *You're a Lucky Man, Mr. Smith* did the same, including many depictions "of an American girl spending prodigious amounts of luxuries in wartime." "At a time when people all over the world are giving up not only for luxuries, but actual necessities," the reviewer declared, "a presentation of Americans

⁵⁷ Koppes and Black, 91-93.

spending money in an irresponsible manner and maintaining servants and large homes, could be resented.”

In addition to promoting war appropriate national behavior and protecting American’s reputation abroad, the OWI demanded that films do nothing that would potentially insult an important wartime ally. Atlantic Pictures’ “Isle of Forgotten Sins” (1943) portrayed the “South Seas as a remote and lurid place where high adventure reigns,” which, in the opinion of the OWI, perpetuated “a false conception of a place, which, far from being remote.... [was] an important theater of war.” RKO Radio Pictures’ “Around the World” gave a “farcical treatment” of the Nazis, which was “contrary to the Government policy of presenting the enemy in strictly realistic terms.”

Perhaps, if left to their own devices, the Hollywood film studios would have only released decadent motion pictures for the sake of pure entertainment. Maybe such is too cynical. It is indeed possible that costume designers and their studios desired to cooperate with the federal government on its conservation endeavors because they wanted to help the nation fight the conflict. They pledged originality, and claimed to look forward to the task of designing exciting clothing in the face of restrictions. Orry-Kelly so noted, “we accept the rules as a challenge, and I predict that we in the studios will set an example of adherence to rules without the slightest loss of feminine loveliness in des

**Chapter Four:
To Buy, or Not To Buy:
L-85 for the Duration**

“Give...Give from your heart....to save the heart and soul of all mankind,” declared an advertisement for Gilbert Adrian from March 1943.¹ Dispensing with fashion marketing altogether, this ad, now propaganda poster, promoted and fundraised for the American Red Cross by depicting a young wife helping the husband who has returned home with an amputated leg. By showing one woman stepping up to her family obligations, and then asking for donations from all Americans as a conciliatory gesture, the advertisement asked the nation to pay its debt to the soldiers who had already sacrificed so much (Figure 38). This and similar ads also served the more practical purpose of demonstrating to the federal government that the fashion and advertising industries were donating their time and effort to the war.²

Believing that American fashion was in a unique position given the loss of Paris as the worldwide fashion center, “Adrian,” the former star costume designer of *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (M-G-M)*, had, in the words of the *Los Angeles Times*, “deserted

¹ Gilbert Adrian, *Los Angeles Times*, March 21, 1943.

² The bottom line of the advertisement reads ““a shop alert to the responsibility of fashion in wartime America,” which will be discussed later in this chapter.



Figure 38
Los Angeles Times, March 21, 1943

might be inspired to patronize designers who publicly demonstrated their commitment to the war effort, Adrian effectively capitalized on his reputation as a dressing the film's top screen actresses for the job of adorning American women in their real lives."³ Knowing that consumers were likely feeling patriotic, and knowing that they purveyor of Hollywood glamour in the midst of the war by promoting himself and his creation by celebrating American patriotism, sacrifice, and volunteerism.⁴

Adrian had certainly created a coordinated public relations campaign to convince women he could provide exactly what was required, in his words, "to register taste without extravagance" in terms of clothing choice. "A shop attuned not only to fashion but to the responsibilities of fashion in wartime America," declared his invitation-advertisement featured in the *Los Angeles Times* in time for the opening of his new Beverley Hills boutique. He inserted a card into the program of his second fashion show of August 24 on which he declared he felt "privileged" to "present a collection of clothes carefully attuned to Government Order L-85." The collection included dresses and suits with names like "Commando" and "When He's Home."⁵

³ For more information on the place of France as the worldwide center of fashion before the beginning of the war in Europe, see Sandra Stansbery Buckland, "Promoting American Fashion 1940 to 1945: From Understudy to Star" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1996), 63-70.

⁴ "Film Stylist Opens Beverly Hills Salon," *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 1942; "Film Stylist Saluted by Couturiers," *Los Angeles Times*, February 18, 1942.

⁵ "One Frog Paddled," *Time*, August 31, 1942; "Legal Silhouette is Made a Virtue," *New York Times*, August 25, 1942. Adrian's first collection launched in March 1942, even before the issuance the order, also showed movement towards the slimmer silhouette and fabric economy. *California Stylist* described the collection as one of "quiet distinction and utter refinement" with a "wartime employment of fabric," meaning the showing of shorter "'Gay' Jackets" and evening wear of gabardine and cotton. "Adrian Employs Subtle Color, War-time Fabrics," *California Stylist*, March 1942, 10.

Subsequent advertisements, twelve within a period of eight months, carried this same message, each with the words “a shop alert to the responsibility of fashion in wartime America” prominently featured.⁶ “Suited to the times, it [a smoke gray suit] has simple richness of line, enduring quality of fabric,” declared one from February 10, 1942.⁷ “A symphony in simplicity,” read another from August 23, 1942, “a costume for you who know that in simplicity you achieve not only good taste but wartime economy.”⁸

Because L-85 only stopped manufacturers from designing garments with certain details that used excessive amounts of fabric such as wide “A” line skirts and round leg-of-mutton sleeves, and because L-85 did not stop fashion designers from creating and then marketing as much legal fashion as they wanted, Adrian and other manufacturers thus encouraged consumers to buy as much as they wanted. Campaigns encouraging patriotic consumption of patriotic products, as demonstrated in previous chapters, helped citizens first articulate, and later demonstrate, their own fulfillment of their own obligations to the war effort, even though the very act of shopping went against government instructions.

In fact, given that L-85 did not restrict consumers at all, the federal government through the Office of War Information resorted to using the only weapon in their arsenal: persuasion. Through anti-inflation conservation campaigns, they campaigned against excessive spending, calling citizens to voluntarily “use it up, wear it out, make it do,” even though these gentle suggestions oftentimes fell on deaf ears. Along with the aggressive advertisements, other WPB policies were inadvertently encouraging the

⁶ Examples: September 20, 1942, October 14, 1942, February 28, 1943, May 31, 1944.

⁷ Adrian, *Los Angeles Times*, February 10, 1942.

⁸ Adrian, *Los Angeles Times*, August 23, 1942.

increased consumption of apparel. Since the WPB halted the production of so-called “hard line” merchandise (i.e. washing machines), yet consumers spending power maintained, demand for “soft line” merchandise (i.e. clothing and restaurant meals) skyrocketed since these commodities were still available. Women’s consumption of clothing, indeed, increased and increased dramatically before the war was even started, and would continue to climb: from a national aggregate of \$4.3 billion in 1941 to \$5.3 billion in 1942.⁹ Perhaps as portrayed by the War Advertising Industry in a 1944 poster, the common refrain amongst consumers remained, “Why shouldn’t I buy it? I’ve got the money!”(Figure 39).¹⁰

The WPB, realizing their initial efforts failed, regrouped: they first considered clothing rationing and, after that idea was also rejected, attempted to tone down aggressive advertisements with a voluntary program of business self-regulation. With regards to L-85, because savvy designers had outmaneuvered with technically compliant fashion that used excessive amounts of fabric, they reinvigorated the limitation order with the program of “body basic” and “trimming allowances,” taking the conversation program further by limiting total yardage with the hopes of saving additional fabric and reversing new fabric-wasting fashion trends that had emerged in response to restrictions.

⁹ Lee A. Craig, “Consumption Expenditures, by type, 1929-1999”, Table Cd 153-263 in *Historical Statistics of the United States, Earliest Times to the Present: Millennial Edition*, edited by Susan B. Carter, Scott Sigmund Gartner, Michael R. Haines, Alan L. Olmstead, Richard Sutch, and Gavin Wright, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

¹⁰ Duke University Libraries, Ad Access, accessed May 17, 2012, http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_W0277/

*“Why shouldn’t I
buy it?
I’ve got the
money!”*

Sure you've got the money. So have lots of us. And yesterday it was all ours, to spend as we darn well pleased. But not today. Today it isn't ours alone.



“What do you mean, it isn’t mine?”

It isn't yours to spend as you like. None of us can spend as we like today. Not if we want prices to stay down. There just aren't as many things to buy as there are dollars to spend. If we all start scrambling to buy everything in sight, prices can kite to hell-'n'-gone.

“You think I can really keep prices down?”

If you don't, who will? Uncle Sam can't do it alone. Every time you refuse to buy something you don't need, every time you refuse to pay more than the ceiling price, every time you shun a black market, you're helping to keep prices down.

“But I thought the government put a ceiling on prices.”

You're right, a price ceiling for your protection. And it's up to you to pay no more than the ceiling price. If you do, you're party to a black market deal. And black markets not only boost prices—they cause shortages.

“Doesn't rationing take care of shortages?”

Your ration coupons will—if you use them wisely. Don't spend them unless you have to. Your ration book merely sets a limit on your purchases. Every coupon you don't use today means that much more for you—and everybody else—to share tomorrow.

“Then what do you want me to do with my money?”

Save it! Put it in the bank! Put it in life insurance! Pay off old debts and don't make new ones. Buy and hold War Bonds. Then your money can't force prices up. But it can speed the winning of the war. It can build a prosperous nation for you, your children, and our soldiers, who deserve a stable America to come home to. Keep your dollars out of circulation and they'll keep prices down. The government is helping—with taxes.

“Now wait! How do taxes help keep prices down?”

We've got to pay for this war sooner or later. It's easier and cheaper to pay as we go. And it's better to pay more taxes NOW—while we've got the extra money to do it. Every dollar put into taxes means a dollar less to boost prices. So . . .

*Use it up . . . Wear it out . . .
Make it do . . . Or do without*



A UNITED STATES WAR MESSAGE PREPARED BY THE WAR ADVERTISING COUNCIL; APPROVED BY THE OFFICE OF WAR INFORMATION; AND CONTRIBUTED BY THE MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS OF AMERICA

Figure 39
“Why Shouldn’t I buy it? I’ve got the money!” War Advertising Agency, 1944

In an unknown number of cases, the WPB also issued injunctions against non-compliant designers, such as in April 1943, when, according to the *New York Times*, “prominent manufactures” of womenswear were “directed to refrain from further manufacturing” any garments which did not conform to L-85.¹¹ Most notably, the WPB launched their offensive against the zoot suit, a particularly flamboyant style of dress popular amongst the jitterbugging crowd in Los Angeles and elsewhere, eventually prosecuting one manufacturer and claiming that he, and he alone, had been “directly contributing” to “lawlessness and hoodlumism,” thereby demonstrating their refusal to accept such a blatant example of public disobedience.¹² Simultaneously, they aggressively attacked the African-American and Latino wearers of the zoot suit, calling into question their patriotism, something which they did not do in the case of non-compliant, non-zoot fashion. They did so hoping to make an example of this perceived particularly excessive fashion trend, and inadvertently, they exacerbated already tenuous race relations in Los Angeles, which later culminated in the Zoot Suit Riots of June 1943.

The continued, vigorous consumption of fashion zoot suit or otherwise combined with clothing hoarding, buying rushes, and the black market all brought unwanted attention that had developed on the home-front between the ideals of thrift and saving,

¹¹ “Prohibits Evasion of Apparel Orders, “*New York Times*, and April 12, 1943.

¹² *Ibid.*, 7. In response to the charges lodged against him, Jack Lamm declared his innocence and mounted a defense with the assistance of his lawyers, William Balter and Samuel Greenfield. The defense insisted that the United States was not facing a shortage of wool, and that the War Production Board’s Limitation Order L-224 was “too vague and indefinite” to be enforceable. The defense further insisted, that an injunction on the part of the federal government would essentially mean the confiscation of the defendant’s property “without just compensation in violation of the Fifth Amendment to the Constitutions.” Essentially, the defense rejected the WPB’s authority to create and enforce limitation orders, suggesting that the war emergency did not justify such interference in business.

and the realities of excess and spending even more so than the patriotic marketing strategies described in this dissertation. Indeed, the federal government maintained that they could not force Americans to accept sacrifice, and instead continued to rely solely on the business community to create marketing campaigns that would not overstimulate demand. All of these threatened to reveal that nothing had changed in Los Angeles, despite the rhetoric of patriotism and sacrifice. Consumers here, like everywhere else, continued to consume based upon the dictates of their individual desires, and the encouragement provided by the fashion and film industries as demonstrated in chapters two and three of this dissertation. Again and again, the federal government attempted to find ways to both discourage consumption and encourage self-restriction on the part of both consumers and business. These efforts largely failed. In the words of one OPA bureaucrat, “never in the history of human conflict has there been so much talk of sacrifice and so little sacrifice.”¹³

**To Ration, or Not to Ration:
Buying Rushes and the Retail Declaration of Policy**

“Stores, sidewalks, streets and transportation facilities were jammed to capacity yesterday as thousands of Angelinos thronged the downtown shopping district to take advantage of the final pre-gasoline rationing days,” reported the *Los Angeles Times* on November 28, 1942. Because rubber was in short supply, the U.S. government decided to ration both gasoline and rubber tires, believing they could save more of the latter by

¹³ Cohen, 70

reducing tire wear through restrictions on driving.¹⁴ Consequently, in a “final fling of automobile driving,” thousands of Los Angeles consumers did their Christmas shopping early in 1942 because, in the words of one female shopper, “shopping is fun, but sometimes it gets a little hard on the feet.” To help the shoppers out, and encourage this last hurrah city-wide shopping spree, the paper had published their “92 page Christmas advertising edition” early.¹⁵

Less than three months later, on February 7, 1943, the Office of Economic Stabilization announced shoe rationing without warning. The order, which limited consumers to three pairs a year, began immediately so individuals could not hoard. In 1942, Americans had collectively purchased 450 million pairs of shoes. In the opinion of the WPB, this constituted “wasteful shoe practices” as consumers purchased “unnecessary styles and colors” only because “they had money to spend.” With the coming of shoe rationing, “formal evening slippers, men’s patent leather shoes, hard-soled slippers, men’s sandals, and many sport shoes” were discontinued for the duration so the available supplies of raw materials could be saved for the production of the “most essential types of shoes.”¹⁶

Despite announcements that apparel rationing would not be next, and again because L-85 did not restrict shopping behavior, consumers rushed stores and launched an all-out buying frenzy, far exceeding the previously described Christmas rush. Donald

¹⁴ Lingerman, 235-243.

¹⁵ “Shoppers Jam Downtown: Angelenos Go on Huge Pre-rationing Spree of Christmas Buying,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 28, 1942.

¹⁶ Sidney M. Shalletts, “Shoe Rationing Puts at 3 Pairs a Year,” *New York Times*, February 8, 1943.

Nelson, the chairman of the WPB, regrettably, had accidentally created mass panic when some of his private statements were leaked. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Nelson had warned a closed committee that the United States would soon “have to reduce the amount of clothing produce” and that this would “mean the rationing of clothing without question.” When later pressed about this after the introduction of shoe rationing and resulting panic buying, Nelson, backpedaling, changed his tune. “We have no plans to ration clothing, we haven’t even discussed it, and we don’t intend to discuss it unless it comes absolutely necessary,” he asserted forcefully.¹⁷

Regardless, the damage had been done. “The Pacific Coast’s war-rich are spending money at a record rate in the big department stores,” reported the same paper on February 20, 1943. It continued: “Hundreds of thousands who are who are getting fat pay are swamping the stores with a volume of business more than double that of such a good year as 1940.”¹⁸ Indeed, the same could be said about department stores across the United States, all of which experienced an estimated 20 to 25 percent higher sales in February 1943 compared to the previous February.¹⁹

In actuality, Nelson and the WPB were being disingenuous. Due to the fact that the WPB feared panic buying, they kept their development of rationing programs secret. To disguise their efforts, some referred to shoes as “oysters” and clothes as “clams” in internal office communications. This language was even utilized in a telegram, pre-

¹⁷ “No Clothing Ration Yet,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 13, 1943.

¹⁸ “Shoe Rationing Lists Coast Store Volume,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 1943.

¹⁹ “Retail Buying Scores Sharp Rise Over 1942,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 1943. Also see “Consumer Buying in L.A. Spurred by Ration Action,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 13, 1943.

written by the WPB to announce the beginning of apparel rationing: “The clams are in the stew and we are in the soup.”²⁰ Buffered by the President’s pro-rationing speech to Congress on April 27, 1942 in which he said, “we must ration all essential commodities of which there is a scarcity, so that they may distributed fairly among consumers,” the WPB had been talking about the possibility of clothing rationing (Figure 40).²¹ The WPB’s Office of Civilian Supply (OCS) believed that clothing production would fall short of demand by 20%, and that shortages would be felt in the fall 1943 buying season.²² Because of this, only three days after the president’s speech, Richard Glenn “R.G” Gettell, an economist for the Textile Price Branch of the Office of Price Administration, had sent the WPB his proposed interim apparel rationing program, interim given the likely challenges the government would face if they launched apparel rationing. In contrast to uniform commodities like sugar or gasoline which were effectively rationed by the O.P.A, fashion consumers purchased a heterogeneous assortment of apparel pieces depending on multiple factors such as geographic location, age, profession, sense of style, etc. Given this, the WPB expected that it would be significantly more difficult for them to control fashion consumption. Specifically, Gettell proposed that American women hold

²⁰ Carsel, 69

²¹ Northwestern University Digital Library, World War II Poster Collection, accessed May 17, 2012, <http://digital.library.northwestern.edu/wwii-posters/img/ww1645-51.jpg>

²² Arthur R. Burns to Members of the Civilian Supply Committee, “Civilian Clothing Program,” February 19, 1942, file 546.041P, RG 079, National Archives (Doc. 312)



Figure 40
Office of Price Administration

in their possession no more than 2 overcoats, 6 dresses, 1 pair of slacks, 1 bathrobe, 1 bed jacket, 2 pajamas (or nightgowns), 1 bathing suit, and 1 ski suit.²³ His plan, moreover, hinged on the belief that Americans would truthfully disclose the complete contents of their wardrobes

The WPB created its own apparel rationing program in September 1942. The Office of Civilian Supply of the WPB proposed a “points-per-units” system where each garment would be given a point value, and each consumer be given a point allowance.²⁴ Additionally, they proposed three other plans that they believed would make rationing unnecessary. First, they recommended the creation of a “victory line” of clothing. The WPB would require all manufacturers to produce a certain number of “victory garments” (i.e. essential consumer products) before they produced anything else. This program, significantly, also allowed for the continued production of luxury goods to be sold on the competitive market. Second, they proposed that consumers be discouraged from purchasing unessential items by means of a high sales tax, perhaps as high as 25 or 50 percent of the purchase price. Third, they suggested that the existing program of textile priority ratings be extended. This plan would also entail the further “simplification and standardization” of clothing, in other words a strengthening of the existing system of

²³ R.G Gettell, “An Interim Apparel Rationing Program,” file 546.09 C, RG 079, National Archives, 1 (Doc. 350)

²⁴ “War Production Board; Office of Civilian Supply; Textile, Clothing and Leather Section; Recommended Principles to Govern Consumer Rationing of Textiles and Leather Products, Should Rationing be Selected as the Method of Control,” 10 September 1942, file 540.9 C, RG 079, National Archives. (Doc. 308) The plan would apply to all apparel, save infant and young children’s wear. Coupon allocation would be dependent on age and sex. All income groups would receive the same number of points with the understanding that lower income consumers would probably not use all they were allotted. Such would allow for the continuation of normal spending practices. Second hand clothing would not be subject to rationing.

limitation orders. The OCS argued that the consumer rationing of apparel should begin on August 1, 1943.²⁵

And then came the unannounced beginning of shoe rationing and the panic buying that ensued in Los Angeles and elsewhere. In the end, the WPB decided not to ration apparel given guaranteed logistical problems that would without a doubt develop and the public's response to shoe rationing, despite opinions in the O.P.A to the contrary.²⁶ In doing so, they again in effect informed consumers that nothing except their own conscience could stop them from fulfilling their own desires. And again, just as before, consumers continued to do as they please.

Simultaneously, the WPB informed the fashion community that they and they alone would need to pick up the slack. They, in the opinion of the federal government, needed to go against their self-interest and convince American women to accept sacrifice for the sake of the war effort. In July 1943, the WPB announced a three-part program designed to "obviate the need for consumer rationing." First, the WPB would maximize production by eliminating "labor and facility bottlenecks." Second, they would direct available materials towards the production of essential goods. Finally, and most significantly, the WPB would discourage "unnecessary forms of retail promotion of textile and textile products." The resulting "Retail Declaration of Policy" discouraged businesses from holding any kind of "sale," except "bona fide clearance sales," and

²⁵ Roland S. Vaile to Members of the Civilian Supply Committee, "Questions on the Civilian Clothing Program," 3 November 1942, file 546.09C, RG 079, National Archives (Doc. 347)

²⁶ Patterson H. French to Richard N. Johnson, "Control of Consumer Demand for Apparel and Textiles," 17 May 1943, Select Document File, Box 775, RG 079, National Archives (Doc. 411)

encouraged them to use their advertising dollar to promote their brand names, the goal of material conservation, and the war effort.²⁷

Importantly, the WPB still did not mandate the creation of a “victory line” of clothing, likely still believing that by mandating style they would only hinder morale by “regimenting” fashion, using the language explored in chapter one of this dissertation. They firmly believed that if they restricted the business practices of independent manufactures too severely, they would only be calling into question the very basis of American capitalism: the reliance on and celebration of free enterprise. Regardless, the very success of the program necessitated business self-restraint. If they continued to encourage consumers to consume, the WPB could still do nothing and the blame would rest at the feet of business.

News of the WPB actions hit the *Los Angeles Times* on July 16, 1943. “The nation’s clothes merchants were placed on an honor system today to comply with a wartime code of selling practices which the War Production Board has designed to discourage ‘over zealous’ salesmen and ‘excess’ buying,” it reported.²⁸ One question would remain. Would the fashion industry of Los Angeles cooperate, thereby going against their own interests for the sake of the war effort? Adrian, for one, on his advertisements for perhaps somewhat impractical high heeled shoes, reminded customers ordering by mail to send in their ration tickets (Figure 41).

²⁷ Doc, 406 (12)

²⁸ “Clothing Stores Placed on Sales Honor System,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1943.

The best shoes you can buy are the best buy!

DELBMAN

dressmaker

Suede:

Something pretty - afoot!



Forgiveness
Ankle Strap. Night-black suede with shining patent bows, \$24.95



Scroll-roll Bow Pump
Black or brown suede with matching falls, \$19.95



Double-twist Pump
Black, brown or blue suede with falls, \$18.95



Dress Circle Open
Black, brown or blue suede with falls decor, \$29.95

Adrian
LTD.

288 North Beverly Drive
Beverly Hills

When ordering by mail please be sure to enclose
Shoe Ration Coupon No. 18

Figure 41
Adrian, *Los Angeles Times*, October 3, 1943

**Peg Los Angeles:
Body Basic L-85**

“Peg Los Angeles,” a quick fashion advice column in the *Los Angeles Times*, coincidentally informed fashion consuming Angelinos that “peg top skirts” were “important style notes for autumn” on August 9, 1942.²⁹ With the passage of L-85, the so called peg-top skirt which was wide at the waist and narrower at the hem had come into fashion because while the order had limited skirt sweep, it did not restrict waistband measurements.³⁰ “You’ll love the figure-following lines of these new black sheers, Uncle Sam likes them too because they’re made with a minimum amount of fabric,” so declared an advertisement for the Broadway-Hollywood for “peg top city blacks” from July 1942 (Figure 42). Bullocks Downtown advertised similar designs in September of the same year. “Our clever designers, not to be daunted by L-85, do wonderful things with skirts,” they declared, “with a minimum of material, they fold and drape and gather into a new slimming line” (Figure 43). Both stores, like others in the Los Angeles fashion community, had allegedly embraced the slim silhouette mandated by L-85 and

²⁹ This fashion column was first published as “Peg O Los Angeles Goes Buying” on January 20, 1918.

³⁰ “W.P.B. Decrees New Women’s Dress Curbs,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 1943.

THE BROADWAY-HOLLYWOOD



be in line with the times in

NEW PEG-TOP CITY BLACKS

29.95

You'll love the figure-flattering lines of these new black sheers. Uncle Sam likes them too because they're made with a minimum amount of fabric. In this Charles Aronow original, all lines point to your slender waist line and hips that are trim enough to wear a peg-top skirt. Sizes 10 to 18, in sheer, cool and glamorous black. \$29.95.

THE NEW FINE FASHIONS



Figure 42:
Advertisement for Broadway Hollywood, *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 1942.

Bullock's
 Downtown Los Angeles • 39, 1911 • Store Hours 10 to 5:30

Soft Suits of Major Importance!

*Preferred fashion for busy women! Away from all hard lines into ageless flattery. All 100% woolens. Jackets, softly draped. Same with rayon velvet collars. Blue silk, cressonk, terracotta green, ivory, red, navy, black. 10 to 20. **25.00***

Roger Linn, Kirk Platt, Arthur's Broadway Advertising

Look to Skirts! *Newest Thing About Dresses*

- ★ The Peg Top Skirt
- ★ The Drawstring Skirt
- ★ The Envelope Skirt

The Arts Grille ...
 Uncle Sam Bonbons
BUY
 U. S. WAR SAVINGS
 BONDS AND STAMPS
 Where You Buy, Buy Right

Our clever designers ... not to be daunted by L-85, do wonderful things with skirt! With a minimum of material they fold and shape and gather it into slinking new lines. Colors are Bullock's ... barbecue, red, bougainvillee, green pepper, California grape, black. 12 to 20. **17.95**

Figure 43:
 Advertisement for Bullocks, *Los Angeles Times*, September 10, 1942

were doing what they could within the confines of the restrictions, including making the peg-top skirt as the latest compliant wartime fashion trend .³¹

While it is near impossible to determine whether or not these garments actually complied with the original L-85, they did prompt the W.P.B. to strengthen and revise the restriction in order to preserve additional amounts of fabric. Peg-top shirts, in the opinion of the WPB, were just one example of a fashion trend that emerged in the wake of L-85 that followed the letter of the law, but not its spirit. While the garment in question was technically L-85 compliant in its measurements, the fashion designer had outmaneuvered the federal government in that they did not do everything they could have done in order to conserve fabric. By designing and promoting this type of clothing, they remained only somewhat cooperative: they saved some fabric, but they did not encourage consumer acceptance of simplified styles.

In response, in their first major revision to L-85 of May 1943, the Textile Division introduced to the fashion industry the laws of “body basic” and “trimming allowance.”³² While the original L-85 only forbade specific voluminous design elements and set maximum measurements, the second L-85 limited total trimming, thereby limiting total yardage. More specifically, the order declared that “a dress shall consist only of the cloth sufficient for the body basic and the trimming allowance.”³³ The former referred to the essential elements of the dress, so to speak, and included only the fabric required to

³¹ The Broadway-Hollywood, *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 1942; Bullocks, *Los Angeles Times*, September 10, 1942.

³² “Reactions to Revised L-85,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, 26 May 1943

³³ War Production Board, General Limitation Order L-85 “Apparel for Feminine Wear,” 25 May 1943, Washington, DC: Federal Registrar

cover the body to the neckline. In other words: a basic dress without adornment. The latter referred to anything above and beyond the fundamental requirements of a dress, added to bring the element of style. This included design elements such as cowls, cuffs, collars, lapels, peplums, and pockets. Trimming allowance could also be used for pleating, shirring, and quilting. According to the new L-85, a dress could include up to 700 square inches of non-transparent fabric, and 1400 square inches of transparent fabric.³⁴

Given these new restrictions, Bullocks Downtown and the Broadway-Hollywood's peg-top skirts had become non-compliant. Indeed, the chief of the Textile Division at the time of the revision advocated for changes to the order specifically because designers in Los Angeles and elsewhere were finding ways around L-85 by creating garments with excessive amounts of trim, which, in effect, nullified savings.³⁵ The peg-top skirt, specifically, was cited as a negative fashion trend as it used more fabric than a narrow, pencil skirt (Figure 44).

The response to the new L-85, by all accounts, was positive across the United States. According to *Women's Wear Daily* designers remained "generally favorable" to the new order.³⁶ One manufacturer called it the "the most intelligent and fair regulation to yet come out of Washington."³⁷ Another noted: "added frills and excess yardage

³⁴ Find simple definitions of the fashion terms.

³⁵ Meeting Summary 19 May 1943, Order Clearance Committee

³⁶ "Reactions to Revised L-85," *Women's Wear Daily*, 26 May 1943

³⁷ "New L-85 Fairest Yet, Says Trade," *Women's Wear Daily*, 26 May 1943



Figure 44

L-85, Office of War Information, 1943

Caption: "All dresses shall consist only of cloth sufficient for the body basic and the trimming allowance. The trimming allowance for non-transparent materials shall be limited to 700 square inches for all sizes, in excess of that required for the basic," reads WPB (War Production Board) order L-85 as amended. These two classic dresses tell a very simple story of saving yardage by controlling the trimming allowance. The original dress at the right uses three and seven eighths yards of thirty-nine inch width material. By eliminating the pleating above the hem (right), a half yard of 700 square inches of thirty-nine inch width material was saved in the dresses at the left, which conforms to the order"

never constitute fashion...simplicity and good taste are the main components.” He continued by asserting the need for war appropriateness: “we are influenced by the times which require simplicity, durability, and warmth. The need for conservation can be upheld without losing any part of our excellent styling.”³⁸

Similar sentiments were echoed at June 1943 luncheon hosted by the Fashion Group International. In the words of Janet Taylor of Marshall Field’s in Chicago: “The reaction of designers, who whom I have talked about these new restrictions is that they are now obviously working with a very narrow silhouette.” Despite these war-imposed realities, she suggested that overall the designers felt “that the amended L-85 is a clarification rather than a further burden.”³⁹

Back in Los Angeles, Sylva Weaver, the ever optimist for Los Angeles fashion, seemingly continued with fashion promotions as usual, presenting her readers with “functional fashion” in the form of a “trim, useful, attractive” blue suit. “The one-button closing, notch collar, straight skirt,” she explained, were “style elements completely fitting into the new W.P.B. Order L-85 limited fabric.” She continued, “this suit uses exactly the right amount yet looks trim, smart, and glamorous.”⁴⁰

On the campus of the University of California Los Angeles, however, opinions were less positive. Instead of wearing so-called “Sloppy Joes” (i.e. big baggy sweaters) with pleated skirts which had become fashionable, even though these did not follow the slim silhouette encouraged by L-85, the co-eds would now have to wear narrow skirts

³⁸ “L-85 Well Received by Manufacturers, Designers,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, 26 May 1943

³⁹ “Rules We Work By,” *The Fashion Group Bulletin*, July 1943.

⁴⁰ Sylva Weaver, “This Suits Wins on All Counts,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1943.

with short sweaters. Despite the fact that the students would have rather purchased one full skirt, instead of two narrow ones, they accepted the mandate, shrugging and saying the “government just doesn’t understand things like that.”⁴¹ Indeed, because body basic L-85 still did not stop consumers from buying what they wanted, perhaps the UCLA co-eds responded by simply buying five narrow shirts in a variety of colors and textiles.

Fashion Lawlessness: The Zoot Suit

The “nice boys, sweet girls,” who spent their days “working on the things that finally will win this war for us,” changed into zoot suits at the Trianon Ballroom to dance the jitterbug once their shifts were over, reported syndicated columnist Henry McLenmore in the *Los Angeles Times* in February 1942. The women, who dubbed their zoot suit styled dresses “defense drapes” because they were purchased with high wartime wages, wore the ensemble because it allowed for “full freedom” for dancing. “In they came, riveters, layout men, jigmakers, punch press operators, drop-hammer operators, rougher operators, girls who inspected rivets, girls who sorted, checkers,” continued McLenmore. After working from four in the afternoon to midnight, the men and women blew off steam by dancing the “Vultee Swing,” named after the Vultee Aircraft Corporation of Los Angeles (Figure 45).⁴²

⁴¹ “Practical Campus Attire Supplants ‘Sloppy Joes,’” *Los Angeles Times*, July 21, 1943.

⁴² Henry McLenmore, “The Lighter Side,” February 6, 1942. For information on McLenmore, see Kevin Allen Leonard, *Battle for Los Angeles: Racial Ideology and World War II* (University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 71. For information on the Trianon Ballroom, see Tamara Stevens and Erin Stevens, *Swing Dancing* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2011), 105. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs



Figure 45
White Zoot Suiters in Washington, DC (June 1942)

Division, accessed online May 17, 2012, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa1998022985/PP/>. Also used by Peiss, 102.

Expensive fashion, including zoot suits, appealed to young people across the country, including the white defense workers employed at the Los Angeles aviation factories, who, as previously noted in chapter two, finally had the ability to splurge after growing up with the deprivations of the Great Depression.⁴³ The booming wartime economy and resulting high wages across all industry sectors also helped young Mexican Americans men and women purchase zoot suits, even though discrimination oftentimes kept them out of high-paying defense jobs.⁴⁴ In the city of Los Angeles, *pachucos* and *pachucas*, as they were commonly known, increasingly chose to don the elaborate ensemble. Men who followed this fashion trend wore exceptionally long coats known as “drapes” with exaggerated broad shoulders and wide-legged trousers tapered at the ankle called “punjabs.” Their female companions, “the zooterinas,” wore knee-length full skirts (or sometimes men’s slacks); dark lipstick and mascara; and equally long “finger-tip coats. The men styled their hair into “duck tails;” the women wore theirs in high pompadours occasionally with the help of a foam insert known as a “rat.” Pachucos and Pachucas, along with the aforementioned white defense workers, thus participated in a multiracial zoot scene at dance halls, movie theaters, and street corners that also included Asian- and African-American zoot suiters (Figure 46).⁴⁵

⁴³ Peiss, 56-61.

⁴⁴ Peiss, 57.

⁴⁵ Catherine Ramirez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit*, 30.



Figure 46
Pachucas in Los Angeles

As the war continued in the United States, and the War Production Board pressed forward their resulting conservation programs, one of the first fashion styles deemed inappropriate was the zoot suit. Frank Walton, the chief of the Textile Division, launched an offensive against the zoot suit because he wanted to make sure that no other wasteful fad would become popular.⁴⁶ The male form of the zoot suit first became illegal with the application of General Conservation Order M-73a on Wool, issued March 2, 1942. This order for example forbade suit jackets exceeding 29 ¾ inches, and trousers wider than 22 inches at the knee or 18 ½ inches at the bottom hem.⁴⁷ The women's version became non-compliant with the application of General Limitation Order L-85, issued April 8, 1942.

Despite these orders, tailors continued to manufacture the ensembles. They began to manufacture zoot suits made out of cotton and rayon because technically these were not yet illegal. To this, the WPB responded by making zoot suits constructed out of any fabric (i.e. rayon, wool, or cotton) illegal. The *Los Angeles Times* reported in September 1942 that this was done so the armed forces would have access to scarce raw materials.

⁴⁶ Walton, 125.

⁴⁷ Measurements for size 32 for trousers; 29 ¾ inches was the maximum measurement for a size 37 Regular. "General Conservation Order M-73a to Conserve the Supply of Wool Cloth Entering into the Production of Men's and Boy's Clothing," *Federal Register*, March 4, 1942. The order was issued on March 2, 1942. Revocation: "Wool Clothing for Men and Boys," *Federal Register*, October 27, 1942. The order was revoked on October 26, 1942. On the day at M-73a was revoked, all limitations on men's and boy's apparel were combined into Limitation Order L-224, which was retroactively applied to March 1942. "General Limitation Order L-224 on Clothing for Men and Boys," *Federal Register*, October 27, 1942. The order was issued on October 26, 1942.

They quoted Frank Walton of the WPB as saying: “We feel sure that all people, young and old, will co-operate to eliminate the waste of cloth.”⁴⁸

Importantly, just as in the case of non-zoot fashion, WPB limitation and conservation orders only applied to clothing manufacturers, not consumers. Given this, it was never illegal to own, or even wear, a zoot suit. Indeed, it was never illegal for a woman to sew herself a “juke jacket,” which some women in Los Angeles did, and it was equally never illegal for her to purchase a larger men’s jacket for her own use.⁴⁹ One official within the WPB acknowledged this in the *Washington Post*. “Unfortunately, if these jitterbugs are buying their fantastic toggerly in a black market,” he begrudgingly admitted, “they have only their conscience to deal with.”⁵⁰ Why, then, did the WPB ask civilians for their cooperation? Perhaps in this situation they asked for cooperation because they knew that without high demand, tailors and other manufactures would not be tempted to evade limitation and conservation orders as they were doing.

Some questioned why the federal government was spending precious time dealing with the zoot suit. The *Washington Post* received multiple letters from concerned

⁴⁸ The *Washington Post* covered the added restrictions more extensively, quoting Walton: “We have no desire to restrict styles or types of garments so long as there is no waste of fabrics. But the demand on looms of production of cloth is at an all-time peak. We can avoid serious shortages of essential cloth for the needs of our armed forces if we eliminate waste wherever possible. In war we cannot afford the luxury of wasteful garments.” (“Zoot Suits of Any Material Ruled Out by WPB as Waste,” *The Washington Post*, September 12, 1942.) Multiple newspapers including the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *New York Times* note that action was taken on September 12, 1942 to restrict the production of zoot suits. Interestingly, the Federal Register does not include this change. M-73a was amended three times (March, April, and July 1942). None of these amendments note the above described change. A real change in WPB restrictions affecting men’s apparel can be found in General Limitation Order L-224 which was issued on October 27, 1942. I cannot explain this discrepancy in the record.

⁴⁹ Alvarez, 98.

⁵⁰ “Yon Clink Nods to Bootleggers of Zoot Suits, Gussets or Not,” *Washington Post*, September 3, 1942. Thanks due to Kathy Peiss for her citation of this article. Peiss, 38.

citizens who questioned why the WPB allowed for the continued production of other forms of non-compliant, wasteful fashion trends while vehemently attacking the zoot suit. “You stop tailors from making long coats and putting on cuffs,” one angry citizen wrote, “yet women are wasting material in all kinds of uniforms for dress.” Indeed, one senator even questioned the WPB’s vehemency, declaring, “as long as these zoot suits aren’t hurting the war effort, I say let them go ahead and wear them.”⁵¹ Even the Los Angeles City Council disagreed, finding “no inherent connection between wearing zoot suits and juvenile delinquency.”⁵²

Despite these objections, the WPB continued on their war path. Kathy Peiss argues in *Zoot Suit: The Enigmatic Career of An Extreme Style* that WPB actions inadvertently brought added public attention to the zoot suit, exacerbating developing racial tensions that had emerged with wartime demographic changes to Los Angeles. The zoot suit thus became, in the words of Peiss, “a political weapon of reactionary forces, including the police and the mainstream press, which sought to criminalize minority youth.”⁵³ More specifically, again according to Peiss, these groups fixated on the zoot suit “as a symbol and source of Mexican American delinquency and disorder,” the zoot suit itself becoming the “focus on social conflict and interpersonal antagonism.”⁵⁴

Since the years of the Second World War, historians have debated whether or not zoot suit fashion should be considered a political statement. Peiss, for one, argues that

⁵¹ Peiss, 91-92.

⁵² Peiss, 136.

⁵³ Peiss, 116.

⁵⁴ Peiss, 110

“the political valence of the zoot suit to its wearer should not be overstated.” “There is little evidence that young men incorporated the zoot suit, explicitly or implicitly, into a stance of opposition to the state, the war, or capitalism, she concludes.”⁵⁵ Others have strongly disagreed. Stuart Cosgrove in his 1984 essay entitled “The Zoot Suit and Style Warfare” argues that “the zoot suit was more than the drape-shape of 1940s fashion, more than a colorful stage prop hanging from the shoulders of Cab Calloway; it was, in the most direct and obvious ways, an emblem of ethnicity and a way of negotiating an identity. “ He continues by demonstrating that the ensemble of the zoot suit became, in the context in which it was worn, “a subcultural gesture that refused to concede to the manners of subservience.”⁵⁶ Much later, Catherine Ramirez analysis of *la pachuca* focused our attention on the female wearer of the zoot suit. She contends that female zoot suiters along with their male counterparts “cultivated a style that articulated a district working-class, Mexican American identity shaped by the experience of the Second World War.” She continues by demonstrating how Mexican-American “laid claim to an American identity, one defined in great part by leisure, consumption, and the conspicuous occupation of public space” by wearing the zoot suit.⁵⁷

Regardless of the true meaning of zoot suit fashion to the wearer, historian Eduardo Obregón Pagán demonstrates in *Murder at Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, & Riot in Wartime L.A.* that the ensemble of the zoot suit set the stage for civil unrest.

⁵⁵ Peiss, 116.

⁵⁶ Stuart Cosgrove, “The Zoot Suit and Style Warfare,” *The History Workshop Journal* 18 (Autumn 1984): 78.

⁵⁷ Catherine Ramirez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 57-58.

Gradually, tension developed between servicemen and Mexican-American youth over issues of territory and access to women. Mexican-American “zooters” saw the intrusion of military men into their neighborhoods as threatening to their communities, as well as to their identity as men. They perceived the unwanted imposition of the nearby navy training school as glaring example of “white privilege” that could not be accepted as the sailor seemed to walk around as if they owned the place. The sailors, in turn, perceived the zoot suiters as lacking any level of respect to the military or the national government. They believed they deserved unrestricted access to the city because of their service in the armed forces. Both groups responded by repeatedly launching sexual taunts; the most common being questioning the heterosexuality of the opponent. Pagán concludes that it was the culmination of these tensions that led to the Zoot Suit Riots.⁵⁸ Taunts gradually gave way to violent attacks where white servicemen ritualistically stripped zoot suiters of their clothing in order to reassert their dominance.

The events of the Zoot Suit Riots, without question, electrified the fashion climate of the city of Los Angeles, leading the Los Angeles City Council to consider a proposal that would make it a “jail offense to wear zoot-suits with rear pleats within the city limits.”⁵⁹ While such an idea was eventually struck down, the council did encourage the WPB to step up their efforts to curb the production and sale of the illegal ensemble. Because the WPB could not prosecute the zoot suiters themselves because the wearing of

⁵⁸ Eduardo Obregón Pagán, *Murder at Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, & Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 71 and 109.

⁵⁹ “Ban on Freak Sluts Studied by Councilmen,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 9, 1943. Cited by Stuart Cosgrove, “The Zoot Suit and Style Warfare,” in *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader*, ed. Jennifer Scanlon (New York and London: New York University Press, 2000), 351.

zoot suits was still not illegal, they targeted the non-compliant fashion industry as being responsible for zoot suit style and, by extension, the Zoot Suit Riots. Consequently, they decided to launch the first case in the courts against the seller of the zoot suits nationwide.⁶⁰ With evidence compiled by the WPB Compliance Division, Los Angeles Investigation Unit, the Department of Justice launched a case against Jack Lamm, owner of Earl's Clothing Shop, in the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of California, Central Division.⁶¹

In the injunction filed on June 12, 1943, the government claimed that Lamm “willfully and unlawfully” violated orders, which would “result in the diversion of material” and “prevent the government of the United States from properly controlling the distribution” of scarce materials causing “immediate and irreparable injury, loss, and damage to the government and the people of the United States.”⁶² The prosecution, moreover, connected the production of zoot suits with violence against the armed forces, suggesting that Lamm himself had been “directly contributing” to “lawlessness and hoodlumism by unlawfully selling such ‘Zoot Suits’.”⁶³

While the entire U.S. fashion industry was effectively encouraging non-cooperation with government anti-inflation and fabric conservation initiatives, the WPB seemed dedicated squarely to defeating the zoot suit alone. Unlike in the cases of the

⁶⁰ “Punishment of All Urged to Break Up Zoot Suit War,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 13, 1943.

⁶¹ U.S. v. Earl Lamm (2979-Y), Injunction (June 12, 1943), National Archives and Records Administration (Perris, CA), Record Group 21, “Records of the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of California, Central Division,” Box 552.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 5 and 7.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 7.

clever manufactures with their technically compliant peg top skirts, or spendthrift consumers of non-zoot sportswear, moreover, the WPB moreover also called into question the patriotism of zoot suit tailors and the wearers of zoot suits for unknown reasons, and did so publicly. Perhaps they were offended that zoot fashion was blatantly non-compliant, while non-zoot, non-compliance tended to a matter of a few inches here, and a few inches there. Perhaps, even, they responded to negatively given the fact that the zoot suit was being worn on bodies of color. Perhaps they believed that minority youth, given their place within society, did not have the right to use materials excessively.

In response to the charges lodged against him, Jack Lamm declared his innocence and mounted a defense with the assistance of his lawyers. The defense insisted that the United States was not facing a shortage of wool, and that the WPB limitation orders were “too vague and indefinite” to be enforceable. The defense further insisted that an injunction on the part of the federal government would essentially mean the confiscation of the defendant’s property “without just compensation in violation of the Fifth Amendment to the Constitutions.”

The federal government, through the auspices of United States District Judge Leon Yankwich, eventually ruled in favor of the Department of Justice, granting an injunction on October 21, 1943.⁶⁴ The injunction restricted Lamm from creating or selling coats or trousers whose lengths exceeding the maximums in L-224. Any

⁶⁴ U.S. v. Earl Lamm (2979-Y), Final Decree Granting Injunction (October 21, 1943), National Archives and Records Administration (Perris, CA), Record Group 21, “Records of the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of California, Central Division,” Box 552.

garment which was purchased or created after the application of the limitation order became unsellable.⁶⁵

Regardless of the Retail Declaration of Policy, regardless of the strengthened limitation orders, women's consumption of fashion only increased, and increased dramatically, reaching \$6.9 billion in 1943, \$ 7.8 billion in 1944, and \$8.8 billion in 1945 respectively.⁶⁶ Seemingly nothing could stop women's uncontrollably desire for fashion, even the war itself. For their part, the fashion industry continued to find ways to make as much as possible. In response to the price control efforts of the Office of Price Administration, they focused their efforts on producing high-end merchandise, leading to a national wide shortage of inexpensive clothing.⁶⁷ With the end of the war in sight, retail sales volumes remained high: department stores in downtown Los Angeles indeed sold 12 percent more in July 1945 than they had the previous July.⁶⁸ Many wondered exactly when controls would be ended. Such hopes were soon dashed. Just two days after V-J Day, the *Los Angeles Times* informed its readers that "the long

⁶⁵ U.S. v. Earl Lamm (2979-Y), Final Decree Granting Injunction (October 21, 1943), National Archives and Records Administration (Perris, CA), Record Group 21, "Records of the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of California, Central Division," Box 552.

⁶⁶ Lee A. Craig, "Consumption Expenditures, by type, 1929-1999", Table Cd 153-263 in *Historical Statistics of the United States, Earliest Times to the Present: Millennial Edition*, edited by Susan B. Carter, Scott Sigmund Gartner, Michael R. Haines, Alan L. Olmstead, Richard Sutch, and Gavin Wright, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

⁶⁷ "Low-Cost Garb Output Short," *Los Angeles Times*, June 15, 1945.

⁶⁸ "L.A. Retail Activity High," *Los Angeles Times*, July 21, 1945.

awaited day after the war” when stores would have “plenty of suits and shirts, girdles and sheets” was, regrettably, still “four to six months away.”⁶⁹ Regardless, questions lingered. Would the end war and the end of L-85 mean a dramatic change in fashion trends, encouraging women across the United States to desire fuller, unrestricted post-war styles? Would this only create a larger supply problem for the federal government to deal with, calling into question the nation’s postwar economic recovery?

⁶⁹ “End of Clothes Scarcity Held Months Away,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 16, 1945.

Conclusion:
“Petticoat Economics,” the Revocation of L-85

Outranking motor cars or radios as reconversion problems are women’s skirts. Now that the revocations of WPB order, L-85, which has kept women in skimpy apparel for two and a half years, is expected soon, the garment manufacturers, the retailers, and most assuredly women themselves, are becoming as tense over future events as stock market speculators.

Malvina Lindsay noted the above in an article entitled “Petticoat Economics” in the October 24, 1944 edition of *The Washington Post*. She continued by explaining the multiple reasons as to why change in skirt lengths, likely in the case of the revocation of L-85, could affect the U.S. economy, for better or for worse. If L-85 was revoked at the wrong time, retailers could be stuck with stocks of unsellable goods, resulting in the loss of millions of dollars and the waste of millions of yards of fabric. If L-85 was revoked at the right time, retailers and manufacturers could find themselves in a lucrative sellers’ market created by millions of American women seeking fashions not bound to the war order. Skirt lengths could cause a rise or drop in the U.S. unemployment rate, and would, in the words of Lindsay, “undoubtedly affect[ed] the pocketbooks of every American household.” “Outranking motor cars or radios as a reconversion problem,” she declared, “are women’s skirts.”¹

¹ Malvina Lindsay, “Petticoat Economics,” *The Washington Post*, October 24, 1944

Lindsay's assertions regarding the future of skirt lengths for the last year of the war and the first years of peacetime represent the feelings of many regarding the future of women's clothing in the wake of the possible revocation of L-85. Designers and retailers at times feared, and at other times happily anticipated, the return of design independence expected with the end of this order. By the fall of 1944, leadership within the Textile Branch believed it was time to revoke L-85. They believed that controls would only hinder the reconversion process, and that the relaxation of wartime restraints would, in the words of Chairman Krug, free up American "initiative, imagination, and resourcefulness."¹ The Office of Price Administration and the WPB Office of Civilian Requirements believed that WPB controls should be used to buffer the transition from war to peace, and hopefully stabilize prices.² The fashion industry, represented by various Industry Advisory Committees in communication with the WPB, who had once dreaded the application of wartime restrictions vocally and publicly begged for the restrictions to stand; they asserted that the WPB needed to look after the interests of business and revoke the order with enough time for designers to change style in anticipation of a new fashion season. Despite this, the WPB pressed for the immediate revocation, only to be out maneuvered by the Office of Price Administration and the WPB Office of Civilian Requirements.

The history of L-85 between the fall of 1944 and the fall of 1946, when the order was finally revoked, reveal larger debates over the postwar economy. Did the WPB owe

¹ As quoted by Barton J. Bernstein, "The Removal of War Production Board Controls in Business, 1944-1946," *Business History Review* 39 (Summer 1965): 249.

² "W.P.B. Says Yes, O.P.A. No on Style Curb End," *Los Angeles Times*, September 10, 1945.

business a smooth transition from war to peace given that they had forced them to accept wartime restrictions? Should WPB limitation and conservation orders be used in peacetime to encourage postwar economic stability by limiting dramatic postwar fashion trends? The answers to these questions demonstrate the difficulties faced by the WPB as they tried to return to normalcy. All within the industry and within government believed that postwar fashions would be significantly different than L-85 compliant clothing. When given the opportunity for design freedom, most believed that the fashionable silhouette would change. The slim, war appropriate silhouette forwarded by the WPB would eventually fade and be replaced by something fuller. Given this, and the likely consumer demand for the changed look, the fashion industry wanted to be best prepared to take advantage of the situation. Moreover, as time progressed, the industry wanted to be best prepared to compete with Europe, especially Paris, which had been the fashion capital of the world before the war.

Eventually the debate between the OPA and the WPB could not be solved without the intervention of John Snyder, the Director of the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion (OWMR), who had the authority to settle disputes between government agencies.³ In a letter to Chairman Krug dated October 9, 1945, Snyder explained why he refused the recommendations of the Civilian Production Administration, the postwar successor to the WPB, renamed just five days before.⁴ He noted: “Evidence has been

³ Bernstein, 250.

⁴ President Truman’s Executive Order 9638 of October 4, 1945 created the CPA, and disbanded the WPB. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online] Santa Barbara, CA. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=77852>.

presented to this office to the effect that lifting WPB style orders now would increase the use of scarce clothing materials, cause an abnormal demand by making present styles obsolete, and bring about an increased price for low-cost clothing.” “Since revocation of WPB style orders would impair the government price-control structure,” Snyder continued, “we have concluded that none of these five orders [L-85, L-116, L-118, L-181, and L-224] should be lifted at this time.”⁵

Having failed at immediate revocation, the CPA gradually removed many of the component restrictions of L-85 between October 1945 and October 1946. In October 1945, they removed restrictions on leg-of-mutton, dolman, or balloon sleeves; they removed restrictions on epaulets and Norfolk backs. In April 1946, they removed restrictions on “shorties” (coats shorter than 33 inches), pocket flaps, and belts/belt loops for women’s skirts and slacks. After this announcement, some in the fashion industry opposed further changes to L-85. “While we do favor easing of curbs from time to time,” one designer noted, “we do hope nothing will be done now that might upset forthcoming collections.”⁶

Developments in the international fashion world eventually would be the catalyst to push American designers away from L-85. With the coming of peace, some American designers began to worry about their ability to compete abroad. Omar Kiam, a former Hollywood costume designer, expressed his frustrations with L-85 in terms of

⁵ Letter from John W. Snyder (Director, Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion) to J.A. Krug (Chairman, WPB) dated October 9, 1945 (Doc. 330). “Style Curbs Ordered Continued for Spring; Snyder Extends L-85, 116, 118,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, October 11, 1945.

⁶ “Opposes Further L-85 Changes for Fall,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, 9 April 1946

his “hands and spirit shackled.” He asked the government to remove restrictions so he could “go ahead on parallel lines with Paris.”⁷ In addition to France, American designers needed to compete with the United Kingdom. “Austerity” limitations on British apparel, which had placed restrictions on clothing design since March 1942, ended in March 1946.⁸ Soon afterwards the Board of Trade began discussing the importance of exports to the larger national economy.⁹ Within two months, British designers began showing innovative post-war fashions.¹⁰

In response to these developments abroad, instead of freeing American designers, the Civilian Production Administration acted to place imported, foreign designers under American restrictions in June 1946.¹¹ The French, knowing their position as a world fashion leader, dismissed the announcement, and claimed they would do as they pleased.¹² Upon hearing this, some members of the American fashion restrictions began calling for the immediate revocation of L-85 in the trade journals of the industry. In the

⁷ Virginia Pope, “Fashion Designer Irked by U.S. Curbs,” *New York Times*, October 16, 1945

⁸ Christopher Sladen, *The Conscripted of Fashion: Utility Cloth, Clothing and Footwear, 1941-1952* (Aldershot, England: Scholar Press, 1995), 22.

⁹ “Austerity Style Controls End March 15 on British Apparel,” *Women’s Wear Daily* March 5, 1946; “British Designers are Eager to Export; Labor and Allocations Still a Problem,” *New York Times*, March 6, 1946.

¹⁰ Virginia Pope, “Post-War Fashions Shown in London,” *New York Times*, May 28, 1946

¹¹ “CPA Says Paris Styles Must Meet Fabric Code,” *New York Time*, June 14, 1946.

¹² B.J. Perkins, “Says L-85 will not influence Paris Fashions,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, June 17, 1946.

words of H. Stanley Marcus: “L-85 should be dropped immediately so that American designers can remain competitive with those of Europe.”¹³

The maintenance of L-85 restrictions would have likely also frustrated fashion designers based in California. As early as July 1944, California designers organized by the Associated Apparel Manufacturers of Los Angeles and the California Apparel Creators had been working hard on preparing for continued post-war competition with New York. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the California apparel industry had created a “million dollar war chest” in order to continue the “stylish battle” with New York.¹⁴ The following August, an additional \$200,000 was raised and given to a national advertising agency to coordinate a year-long marketing and advertising program dubbed the “fashion fiesta” because the industry was expecting “one of the toughest brand war in the history of merchandising.”¹⁵ Both the CAC and the AAMLA, moreover, clarified the post-war ambitions of California fashion. Instead of seeking to surpass New York as the fashion capital of the United States, California designers and manufactures sought, in the words of Lyman Thompson, the Executive Director of the

¹³ “Says L-85 Must End So U.S. Styles Can Vie with Europe,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, June 17, 1946; “U.S. Buyers Abroad Hit by Competition,” *New York Times*, June 21, 1946; “CPA Order Called Threat to Fashion,” *New York Times*, July 30, 1946; “Retailers Demand CPA Terminate Its Style Limitation Order L-85,” *New York Times*, October 19, 1946.

¹⁴ Edgar W. Nassauer, California Clothes: Their Makers Open a Stylish Battle for Post-War Markets,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 6, 1944

¹⁵ “California Styles: Garment Manufacturers Count on Glamour to Boost Sales to \$1 Billion a Year,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 27, 1945.

CAC, “to be known the world over as California, famed for originality of design, daring color combination, [and] quality of work.”¹⁶

Nevertheless, restrictions in the United States remained until October 20, 1946. The removal of wartime restrictions surprised the fashion industry, and their immediate response was to think that designs should be changed gradually.¹⁷ Dorothy Shaver of Lord and Taylor in New York explained, “Designers are intelligent people. They know that fashions moves through revolutions and they themselves will move in a sound, intelligent way now that restrictions have been lifted. I do not think designers will go off the deep end with a lot of radical departures.”¹⁸

News of the revocation reached Los Angeles the very same day in a newspaper article in the *Los Angeles Times* titled “Women Win!” “The government tonight gave up trying to tell American women what kind of clothes they can wear,” reported the *Los Angeles Times*. It continued: “come next spring milady may have just as many frills and fripperies as she wants.” The article continued the theme of the government’s acquiescence to fashion: “this was unconditional surrender to Dame Fashion.” California fashion designers, like their counterparts in New York had simply had enough. They began to slowly design and manufacture “illegal” fashions, likely

¹⁶ Lyman Thompson, “Southland Excels in Sport Togs,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1945. Also see, “Southland Apparel Men Seek Distinction in Fashion World,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 14, 1944; Edgar W. Nassauer, California Clothes: Their Makers Open a Stylish Battle for Post-War Markets,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 6, 1944.

¹⁷ “No Drastic Changes in Apparel Style Collections are Planned as L-85 Ends,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, October 21, 1946; “Marcus Sees Little Effect From L-85 End,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, October 23, 1946; “No Change in Boston Lines as L-85 Ends,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, October 24, 1946

¹⁸ “Store Apparel Stocks For Fall Held as ‘Right,’” *Women’s Wear Daily*, October 21, 1946.

expecting L-85 to disappear soon and wanting to be at the forefront of style changes.¹⁹

L-85 died, on all accounts, a very slow and quiet death.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, as cogently summarized by historian Rebecca Arnold in *The American Look: Fashion, Sportswear and the Image of Women in 1930s and 1940s New York*, “both Parisian couturiers and New York ready-to-wear designers began to promote a nostalgically feminine shape that turned away from the slimmer figure that had dominated wartime fashion.”²⁰ Christian Dior thus released his transforming “New Look” of narrow waisted, full-shirted dresses (Figure 47).

California fashion designers, for their part, continued to assert their independence. “In New York, the designers may be something picked out of the air, or picked up in Paris,” noted, for example, the president of Bullocks, P.G. Winnett. He continued, “California styles recognize and are an interpretation of the needs of the people.”²¹ Faye Hammond who had replaced Sylva Weaver as the fashion editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, carried on by still advocating for the Southland. “Manufacturers and designers,” she noted, “have made the most of their rich heritage of color and beauty and, inspired by the limitless variety of outdoor activities and interests that make for a unique, freedom-loving way of life, have translated their environment and creative

¹⁹ “Women Wins! U.S. Gives Up Style Rules,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 20, 1946. Also see, “Ban on Longer Skirts Will Be Enforced,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 1946 and “Fancy Fixings Okay, Skirts to Stay Short,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 3, 1946.

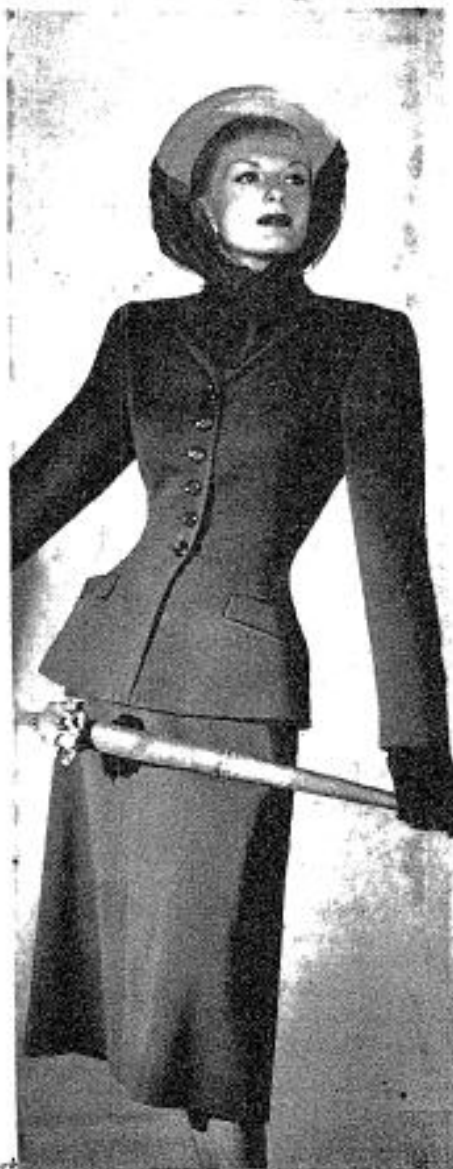
²⁰ Arnold, 173.

²¹ “Leadership of California Sportswear Stressed,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 1948

Russeks Paris Import series

Our Corset-Coat Suit by Christian Dior!

Christian Dior's name is synonymous with the new look, the new silhouette. For Christian Dior is the man who started the transatlantic cables buzzing with his revolutionary ideas about natural shoulders, pulled-in middles, belled hips, and longer skirts. And herewith his own uncluttered original that we've captured for ours alone—a wonderful, entirely new suit faithfully tailored by Weiner in Miron's silk worsted gabardine. In burgandy, regent blue, bottle green, beige, purple, grey, brown, black. Misses' sizes, \$75. Fourth Floor.



Russeks—*Fifth Avenue at 36th St., New York*
Fulton and Bridge Streets, Brooklyn

Figure 47
Russeks, August 28, 1947.



Special photo by Emma Fredrick
STYLE HORIZONS by Lynn Lester of Western Fashions charm
Republic stars Jane Frazee and Catherine McLeod. Jane plays
in "Calendar Girl," while Catherine appears in "Galkent Man."

Figure 48
Faye Hammond, "California's World of Fashion," *Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1947.

ability into the distinctive wearing apparel that has brought them fame and fortune”

(Figure 48)

Between 1936 and 1946, California fashion had increased an estimated 470 percent, totaling \$350 million worth of sales, 85 percent of which occurred outside the state.²² Regardless, the post-war dominance of New York had been firmly re-established, designers there producing over \$1.5 billion worth of men’s, women’s, and children’s apparel.²³ True, California fashion designers had made spectacular gains during the war, but they remained post-war a specialty market producing world renown high-quality, high-end sportswear. Ten years after releasing his famous “New Look,” Christian Dior even visited Los Angeles in April 1957, and his visit was described in the *Los Angeles Times* by Faye Hammond. “I think your California sportswear is beautiful – like your climate,” noted Dior. Hammond then announced that the famous Parisian courtier “diplomatically” and dismissively added, “Italy makes very nice sportswear, too.”

As demonstrated through the examples discussed in this dissertation, L-85 and the resulting patriotic marketing strategies were thus used by California sportswear and Hollywood film costume designers to wage the “stylish battle” of fashion in the midst of the war. L-85 fashion, even more so, helped consumers first articulate, and later demonstrate, their acknowledgement of the war effort. By purchasing streamlined,

²² Faye Hammond, “California’s World of Fashion,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1947.

²³ “Los Angeles Little Cutters: Their Sportswear Always Had Honor in its Own Country,” as quoted by Scott, 26. For more information on the postwar rise of New York fashion, see Norma M. Rantisi, “The Ascendance of New York Fashion,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 28 (Mar. 2004): 86-106.

simplified fashions, female consumers, in the words of fashion designer Gilbert Adrian, could “register taste without extravagance,” and thus potentially participate in a communal performance of patriotism. By watching Lana Turner and the other starlets in *Keep Your Powder Dry* look glamorous in G.I. issued khakis, the same female consumers could learn how they could become women worthy of their loved ones serving overseas. Moreover, in the context of a democracy, female fashion consumers would be deciding for themselves how to respond to the national emergency, and in doing so, they would be given the opportunity to play a proactive role in the war effort.

As the United States transitioned from the war to the post-war years, many Americans sought that return to consumer plenty they had been promised.²⁴ The rhetorical universe of “patriotic chic,” sacrifice, and restraint thus gave way to extravagance conceptualized as necessary and patriotic. In the words of Lizabeth Cohen in *A Consumers Republic*, “mass consumption in post war American would not be a personal indulgence, but rather a civic responsibility.”²⁵ Regardless, the war years generally and patriotic chic specifically had proved significant in laying the groundwork for what followed, providing a transition between the austerity of the Great Depression and the excesses of the postwar period in terms of fashion.

As is usual in the case of fashion, L-85’s influence in terms of style proved fleeting. Post-war trends moved in other directions, towards fuller skirts and feminine shapes that could symbolically celebrate extravagance and economically stimulate

²⁴ Cohen, 73.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

consumer demand for something different. By moving from the “patriotic chic” of wartime sportswear-infused workwear and practically stylish leisurewear to post-war feminine stylists, however, designers may have been participating in larger efforts to return to a “normalcy” that defined middle-class women in terms of femininity. Fashion designers and manufactures could thereby encourage women’s return to the home, just as they had encouraged their active war lifestyle just a few years earlier. In other words, while the full-skirted “New Look” allowed women to reassert their femininity after the war emergency, unabashed shopping for it enabled them to participate in a new form of “patriotic chic” in which fashion and the consumer would keep the nation on track to economic stability. Moreover, this also permitted the recovery of planned obsolescence, the very foundation of the fashion industry.

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