

**“A Very Pretty Business”:
Fashion and Consumer Culture in Antebellum American Prints**

Linzy Brekke-Aloise

Stonehill College

October 15, 2010

(Please do not cite or circulate without permission)

Presented at
**“Representations of Economy:
Lithography in America from 1820-1860”**
*The Ninth Annual Conference of the Program in Early American Economy and Society
Co-Sponsored with the Visual Culture Program*

At the Library Company of Philadelphia
1314 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA
Friday, October 15, 2010

One did not have to look at a framed print in a shop window or an etched plate in a highbrow periodical to see that fashion permeated the visual and material landscape of antebellum America. An engine propelling economic and stylistic innovation and change, fashion shaped the color and cut, make and mold of nearly every good in the marketplace, from the handles on tea cups to the lining of carriages. The power of fashion to structure and accelerate changes in dress was particularly significant, drawing even ordinary consumers into an increasingly complex system of symbolic exchange.¹ Central to the choreography and the visual legibility of everyday life, the rapidly shifting meanings of clothing in the early nineteenth century profoundly impacted Americans' perceptions of themselves and their communities. Prints in the early nineteenth century played a crucial role in helping viewers understand and navigate fashion culture. They explained what was in style, (and what was not), where it was sold, and by whom, in advertisements, plates, trade cards and bill heads. These sources also visually articulated the larger set of meanings infused into the objects available in the marketplace.

In searching for the visual culture of fashion in late 18th and early 19th century America, a problem emerged: very few original prints of fashion or shop interiors survive before 1820. Historians and other scholars are thus forced to rely on European images of these subjects, and

*Some of the research for this essay was conducted while the author was a fellow at the Library Company of Philadelphia and the American Antiquarian Society. The author would like to thank Lauren Hewes, Gigi Barnhill, Caroline Sloat and Laura Wasowicz at AAS for bringing so many fantastic prints and sources to my attention. At the Library Company, special thanks go to Cathy Matson, Jim Green, Connie King, Phil Lapsansky, Erika Piola, and Wendy Woloson. Thanks also to the staff at The Library of Congress's Division of Prints and Photographs.

¹ Neil McKendrick, "The Commercialisation of Fashion," in Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 34-99; Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy*, Trans. By Catherine Porter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), Ch. 1.

assume transatlantic imitation and diffusion.² American prints, especially those by American artists, were late to focus on fashion specifically, either as a commercial or satiric subject. This was in marked contrast to Great Britain, which had perfected and popularized the art of fashion satire.³ Americans were avid consumers of British prints and shamelessly copied them in their own fledgling publications but actual original, local representations of clothing and consumer activity remained haphazard until well into the nineteenth-century. Yet, essays, editorials, and news items on dress and fashion appeared a quotidian part of early republic print culture, becoming as much a feature of daily and weekly newspapers and magazines as obituaries, bankruptcies and court cases. A letter writer to New York's *Ladies' Miscellany* in 1802 described the profusion of print on the subject of "ladies dress" this way: "at the commencement of the nineteenth century, and in a *very enlightened* age, here are two or three publications which appear monthly to teach the ladies how to put on their clothes: and in the intermediate time, between three or four hundred paragraphs, squibs, and sarcasms are printed in the newspapers for the same laudable purpose."⁴ This volume of commentary was simply not reproduced visually. Why?

Technological, commercial, and artistic difficulties, as well as competition from British sources, delayed the advent of fashion-focused print culture in America until the 1820's. But there were other reasons for the delay as well. Antebellum Americans appeared starved for news and information about style and yet struggled with the national political implications of Europe

² For examples of this see Ann Smart Martin, *Buying Into the World of Goods: Early Consumers in Backcountry Virginia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp. 157, 170; Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor, *The Ties That Buy: Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), pp. 99, 152.

³ Diana Donald, *Followers of Fashion: Graphic Satires from the Georgian Period* (London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2002); Shearer West, "The Dearly Macaroni Prints and the Politics of "Private Man," *Eighteenth-Century Life*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Spring 2001), pp.170-182. For an excellent analysis of the range of visual images from satire to scenic paintings that convey important information about clothing see John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) esp. Ch. 11.

⁴ *The Ladies' Miscellany* (New York), (January 1802), p. 237.

dictating their style of dress. It was one thing to read textual descriptions of garments worn at a royal *l evee* reprinted in a local newspaper but quite another to print a plate *visually* depicting them. The former represented news but the latter strayed too close to advocacy.

Magazines expressly devoted to fashion had short shelf lives or quickly excised “fashion” from their titles. Many went back and forth on whether to include fashion illustrations or not, struggling with the difficulties of hiring suitable artists and the high costs of illustrations, they received angry letters from subscribers both demanding “embellishments” (plates) and decrying them. As late as 1842, *Godey’s Lady’s Book* engaged in a spirited editorial debate with readers about the propriety of including fashion plates in its publication. The reasons for the opposition to plates varied; some thought they too slavishly followed London and Paris modes, others claimed they did not represent accurate and up-to-date information. *Godey’s* illustrations survived by re-naming and re-framing them as “Philadelphia Fashions” or *Godey’s* “Americanized” fashions, ultimately becoming the most sought after publication on fashion information in the country until the Civil War, but other periodicals continued to encounter the same kind of opposition.⁵

This discomfort with visual images of *la mode* meant that until well into the 19th century, Americans relied on textual descriptions for information about style, including letters from friends and family members and articles in printed texts. Visually, they looked mainly to one another and foreign visitors for new ensembles. This essay will examine some of the issues inhibiting early fashion representations. It then moves on to focus on lithographs and engravings from 1820 until fashion prints reached their heyday in the commercial lithography of the 1850s.

⁵ See *The Lady’s Book* vol. XXV (November 1842), p. 251 and *Sartain’s Union Magazine of Literature and Art* (July 1849).

As the marketplace of goods expanded, becoming more commercialized and confusing, consumers demanded help in the form of specific visual and descriptive guides to clothing. As technology lowered the cost, magazines, newspapers, and books featured a greater number of detailed illustrations. Fashion news was improved and more informative when accompanied by images. The availability of cheap, easily produced lithographs and engravings broadened the fashion marketplace and made new styles easier to follow. Between 1825-1850, information about fashion shifted dramatically from a literary to a visual format. The speed of lithographic design was a crucial advance for fashion prints, since styles were advertised monthly and quarterly, cutting a wood block or engraving a plate was a larger investment for an inexpensive format that changed quickly. Lithographic coloring also dramatically improved in just a few short years, enhancing a print's ability to convey the rich and brilliant colors and patterns of textiles, which were simultaneously being improved by advances in cylinder printing and colorfast dyes.⁶

Consumers, especially women, seemed far less interested in prints that satirized fashion than in those that conveyed the most accurate and detailed information. Publishers and artists remained defensive, careful to frame their work as edifying, proper, and useful, offering a method of enhancing personal taste and preventing costly error rather than encouraging luxury consumption or excess. They also cast their work in terms of nationalism, encouraging viewers to use the images as inspiration to create, as *Sartain's Union Magazine* put it, "American fashions, the creations of American taste, and suited to our climate and habits."⁷

A range of antebellum prints—fashion plates, advertisements, street views, book illustrations and images simply depicting dressed figures—participated in and helped to advance

⁶ Jane Tozer and Sarah Levitt, *Fabric of Society: A Century of People and Their Clothes, 1770-1870* (Carno, Powys, Wales : L. Ashley, 1983), pp. 27-29.

⁷ *Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art*, Vol. 9, No. 6, (December 1850), p. 243.

a visual culture working to reconcile American ambivalence over fashion by imbuing dress goods with sentimental, gender, and racial meanings. By rationalizing and nationalizing fashion, lithographs and other prints helped to legitimize and accelerate American engagement with fashion consumption, and consequently increased the demand for this visual medium. Fashion prints incited viewers to imagine themselves in new clothes and idealized bodies, to travel to new resorts and engage in novel activities (like steamboat travel and urban promenades), and helped them to visualize and internalize emerging rules of fashion culture.⁸ Advertising images for new styles coincided with narrative instruction to provide consumers with the necessary tools to achieve fashion's exacting standards, allowing artists, publishers and viewers to cast their prints/products as open and democratic.⁹ Americans would no longer be dependent on an aristocratic elite or a metropolitan "beau monde" and the artisanal skill of expensive foreign *modistes* to attain variety in dress; they could take a Pendleton lithograph to the tailor or dressmaker or use it to guide their own home sewing.

On the other hand, the emergence in the 1820's of satires like Anthony Imbert's, *Life in New York*, E.W. Clay's *Life in Philadelphia* and woodcuts in morality stories cautioned consumers about the censure that awaited those who used fashion too freely to contest boundaries of class, gender, or race. Carving out the visual precincts where material prosperity, stylistic change, and consumer freedom might flourish (as well as where it might not), antebellum prints legitimated fashion as a national cultural and commercial pursuit while

⁸ In the case of mechanical books, an innovative and interactive visual format present in book publishing in the 1830s, they literally enabled the reader to see different types of dress on the same woman's body, like dressing a paper doll, in order to teach women the "rules" of color combination and taste in attire. See the illustrations from Mrs. A. Walker, *Female Beauty, as preserved and improved by Regimen, Cleanliness and Dress; and especially by the adaptation, colour, and arrangement of dress, as variously influencing the forms, complexion and expression of each individual* (New York: Scofield and Voorhies, 1837).

⁹ These standards were blatantly construed to be middle-class and white. See Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America* (New York: Vintage, 1992) and Valerie Babb, *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

working to contain its power.

Both the “consumption” of prints and the prints themselves were complex and multi-layered, read and used in a range of ways. Like conduct and etiquette manuals, fashion prints were repeatedly borrowed, referred to, brought to a milliner or dressmaker, sketched, and mailed to friends. As a *Godey’s* reader explained, she had no intention of copying the “entire plates” but used them to guide her own ‘industrious needle and... good taste.’¹⁰ Diaries and letters support this pattern, where writers appropriated, debated, altered, and rejected the maxims of visual and textual sources on dress among networks of kin and friends. Fashion was collaborative and locally inflected, rarely purely imitative, with individuals helping each other by exchanging ideas, information, and labor, as well as actual material objects, such as sewing patterns, fabric samples, and miniature dolls dressed “in the fashion.”¹¹

Engravings and lithographs could amuse and entertain as well as instruct, hung to enliven a factory boardinghouse wall, or brought on board a ship to inspire a sailor’s scrimshaw designs.¹² Precariously perched between art and commerce, they might also be carefully cut and pasted in scrapbooks, friendship albums, and diaries, surviving alongside dried flowers and scraps of poetry as emblems of the keeper’s sensibility and historic memory.¹³ Though often

¹⁰ “Our Fashion Plates,” Letter to the Editor, *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, November, 1842.

¹¹ See especially, the letters from Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, in *The Letters of Mrs. Adams*, vol. 2, p. 282.; Elizabeth Drinker, *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, vol. 3, p. 787; A young New York girl, Rebecca Franks, dressed a rag doll she sent to her friend Abigail on 10 August 1781, writing: “as twill give you an idea of the fashion as to the jacket and the pinning on of the handkerchief.” See: *The American Jewish Woman: A Documentary History*, Jacob Marcus, ed., (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1981), p.1047. On visiting shops to see dressed fashion dolls see Sally McKean d’Arujo to Anna Payne Cutts, 10 June 1796 in *Memoirs and Letters of Dolly Madison*, Lucia Cutts ed., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1886), p. 210.

¹² Women working in woolen mills of Warwick, Rhode Island cut the plates out of periodicals and referenced specific fashion articles when making millinery purchases. See the account book of Mary Anne Warriner, Warwick, Rhode Island, Winterthur Library and Museum; *The Lowell Offering* referenced and advertised *The Lady’s Book* in the 1830s. The New Bedford Whaling Museum has recently discovered a piece of whalebone featuring a sailor’s sketch of a *Godey’s Lady’s Book* fashion plate in its collection.

¹³ Both the American Antiquarian Society and the Library Company of Philadelphia contain scrapbooks with fashion prints in their collections.

unsigned and anonymous, fashion prints served as important artifacts in the creation of antebellum commercial and material culture.

Historians and other scholars of the eighteenth-century are by now familiar with the hand-colored, etched or mezzotinted metal engravings by British caricaturists William Hogarth (1697-1764), Isaac Cruickshank (1756-1811), and James Gillray (1757-1815), among many others, whose colorful prints were imported into the colonies (and then the United States) by printers and booksellers.¹⁴ Of all the social satires that poured out of London print shops, fashion satires are among the most enduring, in part, because of their ease of interpretation. One did not have to be politically savvy or well-connected to interpret the symbolism of exorbitantly high head-dresses, skin-tight breeches, or scandalously low-cut gowns.

¹⁴ See Allison Stagg, “‘All in My Eye’: James Akin and his Newburyport social caricatures,” *Common-Place*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (January 2010).



Figure 1. James Gillray, *Following the Fashion*, etching with hand coloring (1794). Courtesy of Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

These prints did more than comment on the excesses of recognizable social types—nouveau riche, ambitious maids, macaroni men and the like—they reflected a growing awareness of fashion trends on the part of English middle and laboring classes. Products of growing commercialization themselves, prints reproduced and multiplied the wide variety of fabrics, buttons, buckles, shoes, ribbons, trimmings, caps, hats, wigs, and canes available in the marketplace. In as much as they provided a guide, as Diana Donald has explained, “to illustrate the sort of behavior right-minded people should avoid...caricatures were as important as fashion plates in forming the consciousness of consumers.”¹⁵ Further, prints like James Gillray’s, *Following the Fashion* makes clear his and other commentators’ contention that merely

¹⁵ Donald, *Followers of Fashion*, p. 9.

purchasing the correct objects did not guarantee a stylish appearance; one had to pay attention to more subtle factors like body type, proportions, and coloring, applying judgment and taste to a knowledge of contemporary fashion to achieve a desirable look.

Yet guides of what *not* to do were particularly unhelpful for provincial Anglo-Americans, whose appetite for caricatures remained marginal. The brisk importation of early French and British fashion magazines and etiquette books into America suggests that insecurity about style ran deep and guides were preferable to satire. George Washington consistently reminded his London factors to adjust or correct his commissions if his particular requests proved out of fashion.¹⁶ Scotswoman Margaret Hall was amazed that Louisville, Kentucky residents admired her children's frocks, which she disparaged as "worn and washed for a twelvemonth," and eagerly borrowed them for copying by the local milliner. Anything, apparently, "made from an English pattern or worn by anyone well known" she claimed, fetched inflated prices and quick sale.¹⁷ Myriad texts, travelogues, and printed commentaries echoed Hall's conclusions about American thirst for up-to-date goods.

The burgeoning economy of the eighteenth century that made new possessions possible to a wide swath of consumers on both sides of the Atlantic brought with it the problem of choice and distinction among objects that called for "methods of ascertaining...standards of taste" in order to recognize what was elegant and proper.¹⁸ The need for such standards in American life in particular infused discussions of taste with political overtones and urgency. One Philadelphia writer argued "the happiness and character of society are so very intimately dependent on

¹⁶ George Washington to Robert Cary & Co., 6th June 1768; George Washington to Thomas Gibson, 18th July 1771, ditto 15th July, 1772 all in, *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*, ed. Theodore J. Crackel (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007).

¹⁷ Margaret Hall, *The Aristocratic Journey* (New York: 1931), p. 161.

¹⁸ *The Monitor* (Washington D.C.) 18 April 1809; Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste*, ch. 1; David Marshall, "Arguing by Analogy: Hume's standard of Taste," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 28, no. 3 (Spring 1995): 323-343.

subjects of taste that,” in the United States especially, “every solid acquisition of that kind must be considered a subject of national congratulation.”¹⁹

Ideas about taste in America were informed by eighteenth century trans-Atlantic writers like Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third earl of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, Joseph Addison, William Hogarth, Joshua and Frances Reynolds, David Hume, and Edmund Burke, whose work was reprinted in newspapers and almanacs up and down the eastern seaboard.²⁰ Eighteenth - century philosophers, artists and writers engaged in spirited debate about whether standards of beauty and taste could be empirically defined and psychologically perceived. Though differing in their views on various points of aesthetic theory, these writers shared in common an opposition to both courtly excess and vulgar middle-class vernacularism that powerfully shaped trans-Atlantic thinking about the importance of taste in mediating consumption.²¹

To acquire taste necessitated empirical evaluation: judgment and comparison, as the artist Joshua Reynolds put it, “skill in selecting, and our care in digesting, methodizing, and comparing our observations.”²² Anglo-American sources at the turn of the century emphasized the “intellectual” rather than the “corporeal faculties” in aesthetic evaluations, the *Columbian Magazine* asserting that “even among the more refined pleasures, a sound judgment is wanted, to

¹⁹ *Philadelphia City Gazette*, 8 November 1796.

²⁰ Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, Ch. 1 & 2; popular articles on taste referenced familiarity with texts from these authors. See “The Yankee V, Thoughts on Taste,” *Columbian Centinel*, 22 September 1790; European texts were reprinted in newspapers and magazines in the 1780s and 1790s and texts on taste were available from booksellers. For one such list, see the *Independent Gazetteer* (Philadelphia), 22 February 1783. Elizabeth Drinker recorded reading Edmund Burke’s, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful. with an Introductory Discourse concerning Taste* in the spring of 1803. See *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, vol. 2, p. 845.

²¹ Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 90-93; Preben Mortensen, “Francis Hutcheson and the Problem of Conspicuous Consumption,” *Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism*, vol. 53, no. 2 (Spring 1995), pp. 155-165; Annie Richardson, “From the Moral Mound to the Material Maze: Hogarth’s Analysis of Beauty,” in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, pp.119-134; David L. Porter, “Monstrous Beauty: Eighteenth Century Fashion and the Aesthetics of the Chinese Taste,” *Eighteenth Century Studies*, vol. 35, no.3 (2002), pp. 395-411.

²² Rochelle Gurstein, “Taste and “the Conversible World” in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 61, no. 2 (2000): 203-221, p. 209.

discriminate the solid and rational from the frivolous and fastidious.”²³ Writers on dress and the publishers of fashion prints steadfastly maintained that they did not endorse fashion *per se*, by which they meant whatever new or novel style was being produced by elites but drew on taste to frame how studying fashion (through print and image) would help consumers make more rational choices. “It is not because an article is deemed fashion and novel, that it must be adopted by females of every description” one writer asserted but because of its quality and taste. Such discussions might seem academic and far removed from the practicalities of the marketplace but they were actually crucial in divesting “fashion” of its archetypal association with luxury and aristocracy and redefining it for a republican age. Shopping for new goods and pursuing information about novel styles now became ways to exercise rational judgment and taste, which so many period writers had lauded as “a subject of national congratulation.”²⁴

In true Franklinesque form, a broad cross-section of American readers sought sources that would make the art and science of dress comprehensible and accessible. Writers, publishers, and printers were eager to profit from this demand. New genres to visualize and teach “tasteful” dress emerged beginning in the 1780s in England, France, and Italy and reached more expansive readership after 1810.

²³ “On a true taste for pleasure,” *The Columbian Magazine*, June 1792.

²⁴ *Philadelphia City Gazette*, 8 November 1796.



Figure 2. The first fashion magazines: *Magasin des modes Nouvelles*, [The Magazine of New Fashions] and *Journal de la Mode et du Gout*, Paris, France, [The Journal of Fashion and Taste], 1789-1791. Courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

New goods and routines assumed visual and material form in a variety of publications. While short-lived publishing ventures for fashion had been attempted in the mid-18th century in England, *The Lady's Magazine, or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement* became the first serially published work from 1770 onward.²⁵ This endeavor was quickly followed by *La Galerie des Modes* (Paris) and the *Gallery of Fashion* (London). Of course, style was not dependent on periodicals or prints for its dissemination, for wherever ships, wagons, and people traveled, so too did letters, dolls, patterns,

²⁵ See Joan Dolmetsch, *Eighteenth-Century Prints in Colonial America: To Educate and Decorate* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1979).

styles, and information about goods. But because of Anglo-America's financial volatility and the high cost of producing illustrations, expensive, high brow magazines like the *Columbian Magazine* or the Philadelphia *Port-Folio* that featured early reprints of European fashion periodicals were short lived. The lack of domestic artists and the poor training many local artists received resulted in a paucity of visual sources on clothing outside of paintings and crude woodcuts. While almanacs and rural newspapers routinely re-printed descriptions of dress from European sources, American consumers had to consult imported works or the occasional trade card for illustration.²⁶



Figure 3. Trade Card for “Ornamental” Hair Making, Boston, ca. 1800. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society. Though the dress is not detailed in this engraving, the high-waist, low bodice and sleeves were up-to-date, as well as the short-cropped, frizzed hair style.

²⁶ An advertisement in the *New York Directory* for January, 1800, advertised the *London Gallery of Fashions* for sale, “framed and hung up, consisting of two elegant colored plates representing female figures.”

This paucity of visual sources began to improve after the turn of the century. The enormous popularity and influence of John Bell's, *La Belle Assemblée*, published in England from 1806-1832, and Rudolph Ackerman's, *Ackerman's Repository of Arts, Literature, Fashions, Manufactures &c*, both of which included beautiful, hand-tinted copper plate engravings of seasonal fashions served as models for American printmakers and publishers. But the viability of early nineteenth century printmaking relied on a successful commercial synergy of trained artist, printmaker, and publisher. New periodicals like Philadelphia's *The Souvenir*, and Bostonian John Cotton's, *The Atheneum; Or Spirit of the English Magazines* (often simply called *Cotton's Atheneum*) still faced enormous obstacles in attracting subscribers and regularly including the promised illustrations that nearly doubled the costs of production. Many American artists remained focused on higher-quality art projects and were not attracted to the precarious business of periodicals. The artists that could be found to create a fashion illustration were often unskilled and the printers took little care in reproducing the image in a timely fashion, or the copy and coloring was so poor that the publishers refused to distribute the image at all.²⁷

When noted engravers William and John Pendleton opened a lithographic print studio in Boston in 1825 and shortly thereafter began lithographing plates for *Cotton's Atheneum*, they brought new life and skill to the difficult business of fashion illustration.²⁸ The publication at first promised to include "six colored plates of female fashions," but in the first year it only managed to complete two, and in subsequent years, both descriptions and illustrations were

²⁷ Periodicals are full of apologia regarding illustrations. The earliest illustrated periodicals, *The Souvenir* (Philadelphia), *Cotton's Atheneum* (Boston), *Godey's Lady's Book* (Philadelphia) and *The Gentleman's Magazine* (Boston) routinely complain about the cost and difficulties of productions of their plates. See for example, *The Souvenir*, 4 July, 1827.

²⁸ David Tatham, "The Pendleton-Moore Shop: Lithographic artists in Boston, 1825-1840," *Old-Time New England*, Vol. LXII, No. 2. (October-December, 1971), pp. 29-46.

similarly haphazard. But Pendleton's moved beyond earlier simple black and white engravings which were then colored; they placed their figures in scenic poses and posed figures front and back, allowing viewers—who might be tailors and merchants as well as consumers—to more easily reconstruct the ensemble.²⁹



Figure 4. Engraved fashion plate in *The Souvenir* (Philadelphia) for 1828. The figures, out for a picturesque stroll admiring classical architecture have their backs turned in the image, outlining the shape of the coat, gown, and hat. The magazine advertised men's fashions in dress as well as women's but the characters are not very life-like.
Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

²⁹ See *Gentleman's Magazine*, November 1832.

Pendleton went on to lithograph for Boston-based *The Gentleman's Magazine of Fashion* (which quickly changed its name simply to *The Gentleman's Magazine*), which featured six and then nine “whole-length portraits in the latest gentleman’s fashions, finely colored.”³⁰



Figure 5. Lithograph by the Pendleton Lithography Company for *The Gentleman's Magazine of Fashion* (Boston), winter 1831. Lithography, even at this early date, featured garments and accessories in much greater detail with more vivid coloring than engraving allowed. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

³⁰ *The Gentleman's Magazine of Fashion* (Boston: Kane and Co.), February and March 1832.

Publishers specifically addressed how their works could be useful for merchants, dry-goods dealers, wholesale clothiers, and tailors in addition to ordinary readers. *The Gentleman's Magazine of Fashion* went even further, including an illustrated plate containing eight patterns for cutting garments, including coat collars, lapels, and tails in each issue. They advertised the inclusion of such an illustration as a commercial advantage, writing, "Merchant Tailors will find a great advantage from this work, as the Proprietors will publish the very Latest Fashions." *Gentleman's Magazine* began to rely on the visual information the print contained over the lengthy textual descriptions of garments, referring to the "morning dress" featured in the winter of 1833: "There is an elegance and a style in the tout ensemble of this fashion that descriptions alone cannot convey. We refer, therefore, the reader to the print."³¹ This loss-for-words spoke directly to how visual sources could help producers and consumers actualize the styles presented and signified the major shift in fashion representations from text to print.

Very quickly, numerous fashion illustrations emerged, printed singly and as periodical illustrations. Despite serious initial reservations, *Godey's Lady's Book* began publishing fashion engravings in 1830, explaining, "an engraving of the newest fashions for ladies is a new thing as all our fair readers know. We endeavored to have this, now presented, executed in the best style, and in all the beauty that watercolors could impart."³² The magazine's originator, Sara Josepha Hale, finally addressed her early reluctance to include visual representations in an article 1832: "When the Ladies Magazine was first established, I resolved not to ornament it with the 'fashions' because I could not, conscientiously consent to the introduction of pictures which might in any degree, excite or sanction, the rage for foreign fashions, which I so heartily disapprove... We think, on the whole, best to exhibit the syren fashion in all her brilliant and

³¹ See "Fashions for Winter," *The Gentleman's Magazine*, January 1833, p. 139.

³² *Godey's Lady's Book*, January 1831.

changing costume, offering at the same time, reasons why she should not be worshipped as a divinity.”³³ Carving a role out for *Godey’s* as a national tastemaker provided a neat cultural rationalization for a dire economic reality. The demand for illustrated periodicals and newspapers was growing rapidly, and there was little chance that *Lady’s Book* would long survive without embellishments. Noted artist and caricaturist Edward William Clay and Cephas Childs seem to have executed the first plate in July 1830, and again in October and January 1831, with Pendleton’s Lithography Company contributing later illustrations in 1832.

The profusion of visual sources after 1825 promoted new rituals, dress forms, and objects while also rapidly accelerating the cycle of change. During the 1780s, periodicals like *The Lady’s Monthly Museum* might report on fashions for the seasons, publishing two to at most four descriptions a year. Clothing for both sexes was demarcated simply as undress (at home), half dress (worn among family members or close friends), or full dress (for public, social events). But by the second decade of the nineteenth century, publishers shifted to a monthly calendar, including plates that were sub-divided again by occasion. These illustrations also promoted dress forms that were organized around newly expanded social venues like the theater, the opera, balls, assemblies, and promenades that had become popular features of town and city life. Instead of Sunday best and ordinary, dress was demarcated by several points in the day: morning, day, tea, and evening; and then by occasion: riding, hunting, walking, business, ball, church, and opera. Plates that had started off simply presenting singular dressed figures on a blank background by the mid-1830s and early 1840’s featured individuals in elaborate social scenes, including garden parties, genteel domestic interiors, fashionable urban promenades, and tourist pleasure sites like Niagara Falls.

³³“The Influence of Fashions,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* November, 1832.



Figure 6. Fall and Winter Fashions for 1835 and 1836 by James G. Wilson. The figures are shown in front of a Broadway mansion built in 1833 for hat manufacturer Elisha Bloomer, suggesting the print might be an advertisement for Bloomer's hats as well as seasonal fashions. Lithograph with hand coloring by Curtis Burr Graham. Courtesy of the New York Historical Society.

The emergence of lithography, and improvements in metal engraving, created novel visual formats that expanded the market for fashionable goods, and facilitated the systematization of fashion. The history of the Pendleton Lithography Company highlights invisible commercial links between artists and other businesses. William Pendleton sold the lithography studio to bookkeeper Thomas Moore in 1836, who subsequently sold the printing firm to Benjamin W. Thayer, a Boston merchant and former dry goods dealer. Allen Ward, the engraver of dozens of Philadelphia fashion prints, was a merchant tailor trying to combine his

expertise in cutting cloth and carving plates into a lucrative publishing franchise that would expand the market for both his coats and his prints.³⁴ Fashion illustrations bring to light links between various commercial enterprises; a print ostensibly advertising fashion might be commercializing multiple industries and consumers simultaneously. *Fall and Winter Fashions for 1835 and 1836*, presents a multi-layered commercial appeal. Advertising the city of New York and the urban splendor of a Broadway stroll, it advances the allure of the city's architecture, print shops, lithographers, and social scene as much as the seasonal fashions. It incorporates new classes of consumers—young children and teens—and draws them wordlessly into the urban throng. The hand-coloring conveys the richness, texture, and brilliance of the clothes, making it possible for the viewer to decipher even the fur trim on the central figure's coat as well as the velvet braid on the figure to the left. The characters appear more naturalistic than in earlier engravings and the setting, a perfect likeness. In a short span of time, fashion prints had become a true art form.

This proliferation of new visual mediums helped teach readers how to dress “with taste” along increasingly specific and exacting guidelines. Fashionable dress, tempered by taste, thus became a defensible component of political, economic, and social life by 1840. If clothing could convey moral qualities, then failure to possess the “right” clothes (especially in the wake of such easy-to-use and widely available illustrations) was not just impolite but a de facto sign of immorality and an inferior mind. This conviction kept working families out of genteel churches, poor children out of school, women out of promising courtships, and men out of jobs. The defensive discourse on fashion framed new gender, racial and class imperatives in the seeming

³⁴ Allen Ward, *Philadelphia Fashions and Tailor's Archetype for April, May and June 1831*, unprocessed print, American Antiquarian Society.

neutrality of aesthetics, making those who did not or could not follow fashion regulations uncivilized and threatening.³⁵ Slaves whose material life was constrained by masters and working families who continued to wear homespun rarely figured anywhere in antebellum visual culture. When they did manage to acquire well-cut cloth frock coats or pretty calico dresses, urban clerks or provincial working girls were depicted as spending wastefully to indulge their appetites rather than cultivate civility, virtue, or domesticity. Representations of fashion made clear there were gender, racial, and class limits to consumer freedom.

One of the most surprising aspects of antebellum fashion prints is how they appealed to and fully represented men and women alike. Interest in dress was not gendered exclusively female but as the nineteenth century wore on, its acquisition was stressed as more central to a woman's identity than a man's and more likely of those with leisure than those pinched by hunger or material deprivation. Newspapers and domestic manuals in America repeatedly asserted a strong relationship between a woman's attention to dress and her fitness as a wife and mother. Prints fused this linkage by presenting mothers and children in fashion plates. Philadelphia's *Parlour Companion* of 1817 and *Godey's Lady's Book* of 1831, printed an identical article relating women's virtue to a tasteful appearance: "persons habitually attentive to their attire display the same regularity in their domestic affairs. Young women, who neglect their toilet, and manifest little concern about dress, indicate a general disregard for order; a mind ill adapted to the details of housekeeping; a deficiency of taste, and of the qualities that inspire love—they will be careless in every thing. The girl of eighteen who desires not to please will be

³⁵ For ways the discourse of taste and fashion codes are used to establish gender and class norms and police status boundaries see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 4-12; John Kasson has explored the way etiquette enforced class and racial hierarchies in, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in 19th Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), pp. 40-43; Dallett Hemphill amplifies these findings in, *Bowing to Necessities: A History of Manners in America, 1620-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.130-131.

a slut or a shrew at twenty-five. Pay attention, young men, to this sight; it never yet was known to deceive....the desire of exhibiting an amiable exterior is essentially requisite in woman.”³⁶

Gender and dress were fused in a complex matrix of social expectation and essential biology.

Famed writer Hannah Foster’s protagonist, Laura Guilford, a fictional female student in her novel *The Boarding School*, exhibited her own taste through what she wore and how she evaluated the taste and dress of other women. Laura differentiates between “ladies whose gentility and fashionable dress were evidently the product of a correct taste” and “others” who wore “tawdy gew gaws” that betrayed “a sickly taste, to say no more.”³⁷ Knowledge of ideal aesthetic qualities differentiated the genteel and the fashionable from the tawdry and sickly. Laura illustrated the material difference between them: “I am furnished with feathers, flowers, and ribbons in profusion. I shall, however, use them very sparingly.”³⁸ A restrained and measured engagement with contemporary modes marked the lady of taste from the lady of fashion; this engagement both constituted and expressed her moral and intellectual character.

Time and again, Foster, like other antebellum writers, differentiated taste from fashion, but instructed on how to use fashion to exhibit personal virtue through tasteful attire. She wrote: “A gaudy and fantastical mode of decoration is by no means a recommendation. It bespeaks a lightness of mind and a vanity of disposition, against which a discreet and modest girl should guard with the utmost vigilance. It is a very false taste which induces people in dependent and narrow circumstances, to imitate the expensive mode of dress which might be very decent for those who move in a higher sphere.”³⁹ The use of clothing for social climbing, in her argument,

³⁶ *Columbian Magazine*, September 1787; A Lady of Distinction, *The Mirror of the Graces* (New York: 1813), p. 107; *The Parlour Companion*, (1817), p. 55; *The Lady’s Book*, 12 October 1830.

³⁷ Hannah Foster, *The Boarding School; Or, Lessons of a Preceptress to her Pupils... By a Lady of Massachusetts* (Boston: 1798), p.107.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Foster, *The Boarding School*, p. 57.

appears immoral because it offends aesthetic principles not social order, reinforcing ideas about a material culture bound by rules of taste rather than class. Yet the poor, she suggests, cannot authentically participate in this culture; taste for them, presumably, involved dressing in such a way that they would not be noticed at all.

Visual sources in juvenile literature and Sunday school tracts in the early nineteenth century appeared in this vein to take up the duty of illustrating and detailing specific examples of fashion transgressions. Several of these stories featured children of artisans and farmers, “humble” boys and girls who became maimed, poisoned, or nearly killed because they lacked social judgment and indulged a vanity for clothes. Figure 7 offers a rare illustration of what it might have been like to be on the receiving end of a fashion critique from New England novelist Lucy Cleveland.

In the work, *The Little Girl Who Was Taught by Experience*, Lucy, a young girl from York, Maine travels to Boston to visit well-to-do cousins during a summer holiday.⁴⁰ Thinking it was important to dress well in an urban environment, the protagonist wore her Sunday best, a silk frock with elaborate piping around the bottom, leg-of-mutton sleeves, and a bonnet festooned with fake flowers to a country picnic. Cleveland’s story is a classic morality tale of pride coming before the fall. The protagonist Lucy expressed her sense of how dress mediated social relationships. Before her looking glass, she hoped that her cousins “would have admired her finery, and that they would have paid her a good deal of respect.” But her judgment appeared flawed and nearly became fatal, for in fact “they laughed at her, and said they supposed she must have lost her way, for she never could think of coming to play with them in such a figure.” Cast out from the society of “proper, comfortable and neat” children in plain frocks and sensible boots, a series of disasters proceed to befall Lucy: garden fruit stains her sleeves, the

⁴⁰ Lucy Cleveland, *The Little Girl Who Was Taught By Experience*, (Boston, 1827), p. 12.

lace trimming on her dress gets caught on a rose bush and “torn almost entirely off,” and finally, a horse breaks loose from a pasture and nearly tramples Lucy to death because her confining dress and satin slippers prevent her from running to safety.



Figure 7. Woodcut from Lucy Cleveland’s, *The Little Girl Who Was Taught by Experience* (Boston: 1827). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.⁴¹

In the accompanying illustration, pastoral comeliness, republican simplicity, and uniformity are presented as the aesthetic ideals of children who have dressed rationally (and nearly identically) for the outdoors and who point, laugh and mock the young provincial visitor.

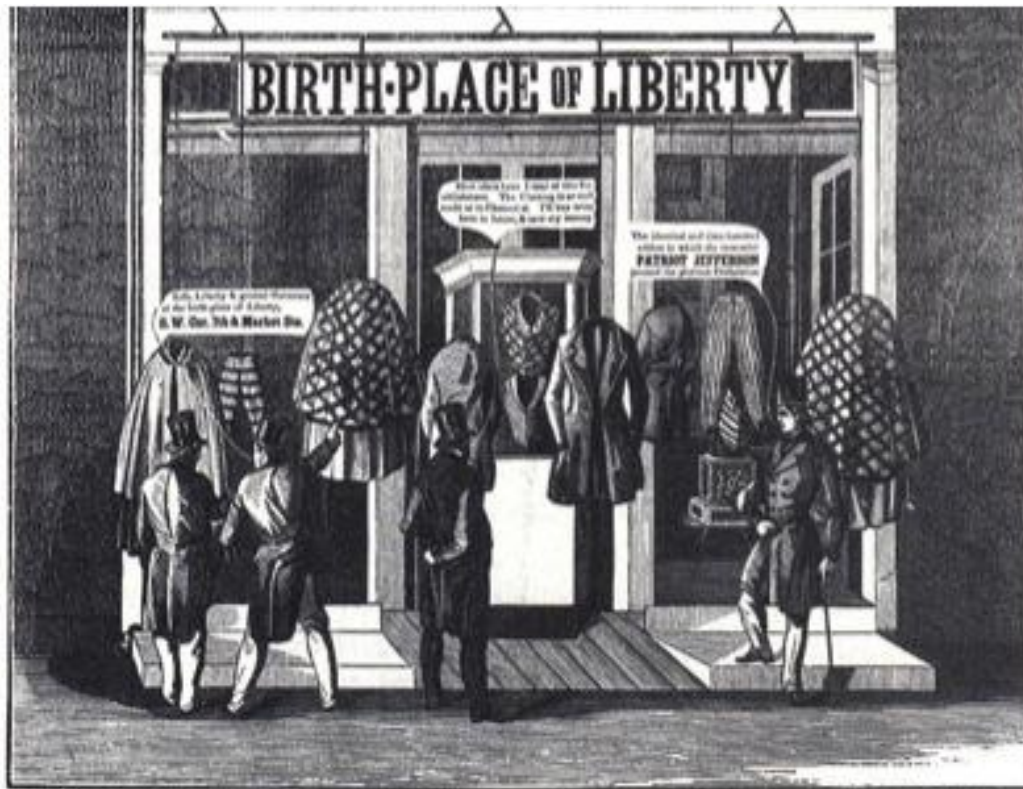
⁴¹ Lucy Cleveland’s publications are all in the vein of disciplining provincial and laboring class consumerism and personal vanity, see: *The Vain Cottager; or, the History of Lucy Franklin; Temptation, or Henry Morland*, (Boston: 1827); *The Dainty Boy* (Boston: 1827); *The Shower* (Boston: 1827); *The Little Girl Who Was Taught by Experience* (Boston: 1827); *The Black Velvet Bracelet* (Boston: 1828); *Annette Warrington* (Boston: 1832); *Adventures of Willison Avery* (Boston: 1833); *The Carpenter and His Family, or, Pride Subdued* (Boston: 1835), originals in the Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum. See Paula Bradstreet Richter, “Lucy Cleveland’s ‘Figures of Rags’: Textile Arts and Social Commentary in Early-Nineteenth Century New England,” in *Textiles in Early New England: Design, Production, and Consumption* (Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife, 1997), pp. 48-63.

The image depicts a harmonious landscape characterized by “natural” taste, where fashions in dress are sensitive to occasion, age, and status. Reversing the stereotype of crude provincials and fashionable urbanites, Cleveland exposes how the logic of taste rationalized fashion. It was irrational and wrong to dress in one’s Sunday best for an outdoor picnic. Lucy’s poor judgment of the circumstance and her attempt to use fancy clothing to acquire respect results in social dislocation as well as severe physical harm. Certainly this story was part and parcel of a didactic genre that sought to inculcate moral and religious values and warn against the sins of pride and vanity in young readers; but significantly, it relied on gendered and class-based understandings of fashion to affect the lesson.

In contradistinction to laborers, prints suggest that the pleasures of consumption were ideologically available to men so long as they did not trespass the boundaries of economic self-discipline and manliness. Editorialists never ceased reminding male readers: “Gaudiness and finery may indeed become the...obsequious ball-room coxcomb, but it is inconsistent with the dignity of manhood, and rarely, if ever, accompanied with greatness or elevation of mind.”⁴² Critics claimed that men (like women) were selfishly leaving the farm for factories and other jobs in the northeast in order to acquire cash and fashionable clothes. The image of social-climbing Broadway clerks in bold checks and flashy Bowery immigrants flaunting their gold watches dominated antebellum depictions of urban men.⁴³ Yet the “dignity of manhood” was not nakedness but the sober, dark, broadcloth suit.

⁴² *The New Mirror*, 20 December, 1823.

⁴³ See Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*, p. 144; also, Brian Luskey, “Jumping Collars in White Collars: Manliness, Respectability, and Work in the Antebellum City,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 26 (Summer 2006): 173-219.



BIRTH-PLACE OF LIBERTY,
South West Corner of 7th and Market Streets.

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for Gentlemen to cast off their faded garments, and appear in such new habiliments as the laws of **Fashion and Comfort** call for, a decent respect for the **Memory of our Revolutionary Patriots** demands that they should all call and purchase their external covering at the **Birth-Place of Liberty**, which is the identical and time-honored edifice in which the

IMMORTAL PATRIOT, THOMAS JEFFERSON,
Penned the Glorious Declaration of our Unalienable Rights,

AMONG WHICH ARE LIFE, LIBERTY, AND GENTEEL GARMENTS, AT THE SOUTH WEST CORNER OF SEVENTH AND MARKET STREETS.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that men are created equal—that they can obtain Clothing, as rich, as cheap, and as durable as at any other establishment in the nation, either by the dozen or single garment. Under the circumstances of this particular case, and in these days of lunacy, it becomes necessary to state that 15 years' experience, and an ample cash capital, to make selections and purchases, will carry us out in what we assert. The style and workmanship is well known by the public, and the very low prices in every day becoming more notorious. Our shelves are now filled with the choicest collection of Fashionable Ready-made Clothing, consisting of Boys' as well as Men's Cloaks, Overcoats, Sack Coats, Military Jackets, Business Sacks, Frock Sacks, Catalonia Cloaks, Dresses and Frock Coats, Pantaloon and Vests.

WILLIAM HICKS.

WM. BROWN, Proprietor.

Figure 8. This trade card (ca. 1830) for William Brown’s ready-to-wear clothing store in Philadelphia presents inexpensive men’s suits as an “unalienable right.” Courtesy of the New York Historical Society.

Buying a decent suit required good cloth, credit and the skillful sewing of mothers, wives, or a tailor. David Clapp, a printer’s apprentice devoted over two-thirds of his income in 1824 towards a new suit, several shirts, an overcoat, hat, pantaloons, and vest.⁴⁴ Young men seeking positions as clerks, merchants assistants, and ships officers knew they would not get

⁴⁴ Diary of David Clapp, 1822-1824, Old Sturbridge Village, Sturbridge, Massachusetts.

their foot through the door without a suitable coat and a white collar.⁴⁵ Working-men frequented auction houses, second-hand dealers, and begged, borrowed and occasionally stole the necessary clothing needed to gain access to employment and social opportunities.⁴⁶ The rise of the men's ready-to wear clothing industry emerged in part to create a democratic mass of male workers who could acquire fashionable clothing easily and relatively inexpensively. Men's fashions shifted seasonally, but the changes were subtle and less dramatic than for women.

In prints where men were satirized, it was because they had exhibited too passionate an interest in fashion or transgressed the boundaries of economic rationality.⁴⁷ Success in an expanding economy required the kind of self-discipline and willingness to work hard that a man in a skin-tight coat and trousers was surely incapable of. The ideal of the self-made man in antebellum America was one who relied on his exertion, not his appearance, to get ahead. Yet this represented a false dichotomy. Middle-class men were expected to follow fashion and present a respectable appearance as proof of their republican citizenship and participation in a market economy. Prints appealed to a wide swath of men who required "business attire" to go to work. Renowned artist David Claypoole Johnston explicitly played on the connection between a fashionable appearance and commercial prowess in an advertisement for a stock store in Boston, implying that the former attribute directly implied the latter.

⁴⁵ See Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*, ch. 4 & 5; also, the letters of Cyrus Beebe in the Beebe Family Papers, OSV. (1990.17); Diary of Philo Munn, 1834-1835, Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library, Historic Deerfield, Deerfield, Massachusetts.

⁴⁶ Junius Beebe of western Massachusetts went to sea at age 15 and almost all of his earnings on clothing. His brother Cyrus, also a sailor, was desperate to secure a position as an officer but his family could not afford the dress uniform required so he rented clothes and bought his other military equipment at auction. See the letters of Junius Beebe, 4, Novemer 1827, 7 August 1828, 1 Sept. 1829; letters of Cyrus Beebe 8 November 1835. 13 April 1836, and an undated letter to Stuart Beebe, all in Beebe Family Papers, Old Sturbridge Village.

⁴⁷ Thomas L. Haskell and Richard F. Teichgraeber III, eds., *The Culture of the Market: Historical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). David Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Toby L. Ditz, "Shipwrecked; or, Masculinity Imperiled: Mercantile Representations of Failure and the Gendered Self in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," *Journal of American History* 81 (June 1994): 51-81.

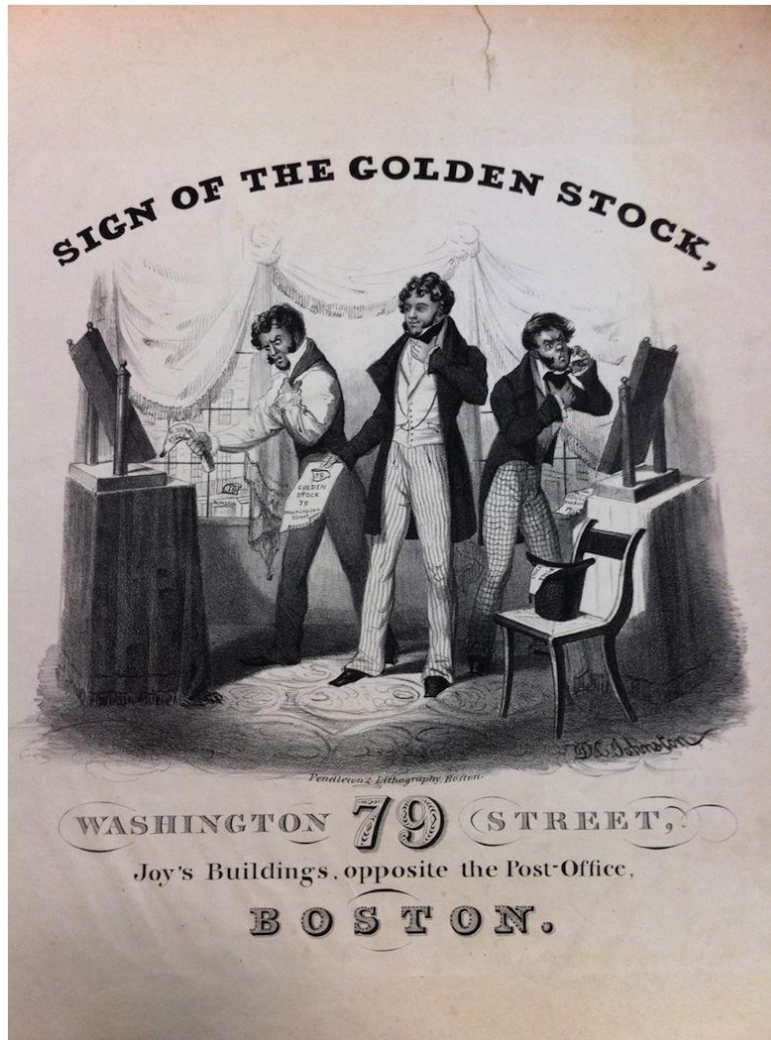


Figure 9. Lithograph representing three speculators who have invested in different “stocks,” the figures left and right struggle with their neckwear and hold stocks labeled “New York” and “Philadelphia” respectively. The central character appears fashionably at ease having invested in “79 Washington Street Boston” stock. David Claypoole Johnston was the artist and Pendleton’s Lithography studio published the print, ca. 1835-1836. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

White-collar men had to tread carefully between the boundaries of manliness and fashionability, consuming for business rather than for pleasure. But the cultural and moral capital of tasteful attire remained available to them, if circumscribed. The same was simply not true for African-Americans. Representations of fashion in relationship to slaves or Afro-northerners depicted them cruelly as satirical figures of fun. Lithographed cartoons were the

chosen media of white caricaturists, such as renowned Philadelphia artist Edward Clay, who sketched comedic portraits of city life in the 1820's and 30's. Historians by now have thoroughly analyzed Clay's prints for evidence of the tenor and virulence of northern white racism but few have examined the graphics for their material details. The prints were saturated with specific symbols of antebellum fashion culture which supplied the punch line to Clay's "jokes." The throngs of consumers who bought the prints in numerous editions in England and America from the 1820s through the 1870s testify to these objects enduring resonance.⁴⁸

Clay's satire, like his English models, relied on the content of the graphics with minimal dialogue to render its message. The series as a whole attempted to create a black fashion type—a stereotypical identity like the fop, dandy, and dandizette—that would allow white patrons encountering a few black figures to visualize the race as a whole. The symbols of fashion and consumer culture play on a series of objects and spaces to materialize racist arguments about the inferiority of black gender roles, taste, and citizenship. In the print, "Things by their Right Name" an African-American female shopper wearing a clashing array of prints and bright colors, an oversized hat, fawn kid gloves, large gold pendant earrings and carrying a pink umbrella, peers through an eye glass and authoritatively commands a pair of "flesh colored" silk stockings from a foppish and effeminate French shop clerk. He returns with a pair of black stockings, assuring her of their excellent quality.

⁴⁸ I am indebted to Philip Lapsansky at the Library Company of Philadelphia for introducing me to the Library's vast collection of graphic material related to African-Americans and their display in Philadelphia.



Figure 10. Edward Clay, “Things by their Right Name” (Philadelphia, 1829), hand-colored lithograph. *Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.*

Clay’s depiction shows free blacks exercising consumer freedom at store counters as optical and graphic intrusions, a debasement of civilized white practices. In satirizing African-American shoppers, he claimed that their efforts to participate in fashion culture were invariably wrong. The oversized nature of the female figure as well as her mixture of color, pattern, and accessories construed an image of emasculated black women who appear tasteless and hopelessly different. Either the shopper did not understand the rules of fashion or she did not care. Rather than a source of shared gendered subjectivity or middle class culture, graphic representations placed Afro-consumers outside the boundaries of taste, sensibility, and

domesticity, the very tropes the female fashion consumer had come to represent. The print is not much kinder towards the Frenchified male fop behind the counter who stood for the class of fashionable male clerks antebellum prints also liked to satirize.⁴⁹

The humor, as it were, lay in the clerk's blithe assertion of racial difference over consumer choice by offering his customer black stockings instead of the pale colored goods she had ostensibly requested. Though technically subordinate (and French!), the white clerk's race allowed him to invert the patron-client hierarchy to rudely refuse the Afro-Philadelphian's request to consume stockings that the print uses to represent the white body politic. The message was clear: no attempts at taste or fashionability could alter who she really was; black women's participation in consumer or fashion culture could not facilitate claims to feminine status, middle class respectability, or alter their essential racial difference. This visual strategy emphasized failed similarity and enduring difference, cordoning off cultural and civic life exclusively for whites. Ridiculed when they appeared too different, African-Americans were simultaneously ridiculed for trying to look the same.

The promotion of fashion through commercial lithography and engraving helped to reconcile antebellum Americans to the expansion of consumerism and the place of European styles in national life. It also provided a medium through which artists could visualize, organize, and manage some of the broad social and cultural changes in their midst. Yet it is crucial that we place the proliferation of pictorials representing the giddy expansion of consumer culture beside their opposite, those images that erected barriers to control fashion's insignias of power. These works enhanced the process of reading and visualizing bodies, a development that helped to create new norms of dress and visual signs of difference. It was part of a gendered and racialized

⁴⁹ On prints representing the feminization of antebellum male shop clerks see Brian Luskey, "Jumping Counters in White Collars," *Journal of the Early Republic* 26 (Summer 2006): 173-217.

cultural landscape that placed greater emphasis on appearance and the cultivation of taste for middle-class whites while cordoning off these arenas for the working poor and African-Americans.