Fashioning the Midwest
At the Heart of Turtle Island

Costume Society of America's
Midwest Regional Symposium

Symposium Program

November 6–7, 2025 • Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Costume Society of America

Mission
The Costume Society of America fosters an understanding of appearance and dress practices of people across the globe through research, education, preservation, and design. Our network of members studies the past, examines the present, and anticipates the future of clothing and fashion.

About
The Costume Society of America (CSA) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded on March 23, 1973, and incorporated in the state of New York on September 12, 1973.
CSA serves its members, and promotes its goals with national symposia and publications including the journal Dress and its monthly electronic newsletter CSA e-News.
The organization began forming regional groups in 1978. There are six regional groups in the United States and Canada, and one international group. Individual regions hold annual meetings, sponsor programs and publish newsletters.

Overview
CSA serves individuals, students, institutions, and libraries. Our primary membership consists of individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds, both generalist and specialist, who share a passion for the history and serious study of costume. We seek members who are involved in the study, education, collection, and preservation, presentation, and interpretation of dress and appearance in our past, present, and future.

Thank you
The Costume Society of America would like to give a special thanks to our host museum the Bata Shoe Museum, keynote speaker Justine Woods, Curator of Indigenous Collections and Jordan-na Belle-Isle, Manager of Visitor & Venue Services. Thank you to the Royal Ontario Museum, Sarah Fee, Senior Curator, Global Fashion and Textiles and Karla Livingston, Collections Specialist, Global Fashion and Textiles, for providing a tour and Food Dudes for catering. Thank you to the organizing committee members Eve Townsend, Patricia Edmonson, Joshua Simon, Magdelena Samulski, Tarah Burke, Shiman Li and Andrea Melvin for making this event possible.

Costume Society of America's
Midwest Regional Symposium Schedule

Unless otherwise noted activities will take place in the
Bata Shoe Museum, 327 Bloor Street West Toronto, Ontario, ***Footprints Meeting Room***

Thursday, November 6, 2025	
8:30 am - 9:00 am	Symposium Registration *(Bata Shoe Museum Lobby)*
9:00 am - 1:00 pm	Coffee, Water and Snacks Provided
9:00 am - 9:15 am	Welcome to Toronto, Eve Townsend, Toronto Metropolitan University, Fashion Research Collection
9:30 am -10:30 am	Keynote Speaker, Justine Woods, Curator of Indigenous Collections, Bata Shoe Museum
10:30 am - 11:00 am	Coffee Break
11:00 am - 12:00 pm	Session 1 Research Presentations
	Valerie St.Pierre Smith, Designer, Artist, Scholar, Owner of Beauty is Medicine, *Gather in Beauty: Starting in a Good Way*
	Shawkay Ottmann, Cornell University, *Indigenous Land-Based Fashion as Healing*
	Echo Lorraine Malleo, Kent Historical Society, *The Use of Clothing in Museum Displays on Native American Boarding Schools and Forced Assimilation*
12:00 pm - 1:00 pm	Lunch Provided
12:15 pm - 1:00 pm	Film Showing: Sandra Tullio Pow, Toronto Metropolitan University, *Quillworking And Memories with Agnes Mitchell*
1:00 pm -2:00 pm	Session 2 Research Presentations
	Alexis Walker, McCord Stewart Museum Montreal, *"The Coat of the Age": The Kul-e-Tuk Parka, Inuit Cultural Appropriation and the Commercialization of Settler Canadian Identity*
	Jenise Sileo, Librarian and Independent Researcher, *Plateau Beaded Bags: Cultural Noise for Yakama Artist and Museum Collections*
	Valerie St.Pierre Smith, Designer, Artist, Scholar, Owner of Beauty is Medicine, *Animating Language, Animating Dress: Reworking English Language Influences on Our Understanding of Dress*
2:00 pm - 2:15 pm	Break
2:15 pm - 4:15 pm	Bata Shoe Museum Tour
	Dinner On Your Own

Friday, November 7, 2025	
10:00 am - 12:00 pm	Royal Ontario Museum Archives Tour (100 Queen's Park, Toronto, Meet in lobby)
12:00 pm - 1:30 pm	Lunch On Your Own
1:30 pm - 3:30 pm	Coffee, Water and Snacks Provided
1:30 pm - 2:30 pm	Session 3 Research Presentations
	Charlene K. Lau, Independent Scholar, *Yahoo/Yeehaw: Cowboy Culture in the Asian Diaspora*
	Sara Wilcox, University of Minnesota, *Teaching Global, Learning Local: A Field Trip to an International Market*
	Taiwo Bamidele, University of Nebraska, *Dress and the Construction of Place Identity Among Enslaved Individuals: A Historical and Cultural Analysis*
2:30 pm - 3:30 pm	Coffee Break and Regional Chair Announcements, Andrea Melvin, Grand Rapids Public Museum Michigan
3:30 pm - 4:45 pm	Session 4 Research Presentations
	Ci Phillips, Mahogany at 50, *Dressed for Agency: A Black Woman's Journey from a Chicago Housing Project to New York's Runways*
	Jessica Pushor, Chicago History Museum, *Sex in the Windy City: Burlesque star Sally Rand, her feather fans, and the Chicago History Museum*
	Leigh Southward, University of Arkansas, *Best Dressed Man on the Football Field*
	Patrick Taylor, ArQuives, *Keeping Our Stories Alive: The Collection and Care of Dress in the ArQuives*
4:45 pm - 5:00 pm	Symposium conclusion and thank you from CSA

Please note that all times and sessions are tentative and subject to change.

Thursday, November 6, 2025

9:30 am -10:30 am
Keynote Presentation
Justine Woods, Curator of Indigenous Collections, Bata Shoe Museum.

Justine Woods is a garment-artist, creative scholar, educator, and curator. She holds the role of Curator of Indigenous Collections at the Bata Shoe Museum and is a PhD Candidate in Media and Design Innovation at Toronto Metropolitan University in Toronto, Canada. Stretching across fields of study, including but not limited to, fashion studies, performance and embodiment, and research-creation, Justine's work passionately situates fashion as a pluriversal phenomenon. Her research centres garment-making as a practice-based method of inquiry toward re-stitching alternative worlds that prioritize Indigenous resurgence and liberation. Justine's work has been included in both solo and group exhibitions across so-called Canada, hosted by the Art Gallery of Guelph, Quest Art Gallery, Fifty Fifty Arts Collective, Between Pheasants Contemporary, DesignTO, and the MacLaren Arts Centre. Her writing has been published in a variety of scholarly journals such as Fashion Studies, Pathways: The Ontario Journal of Outdoor Education, and Scene. To learn more about Justine, please visit her website: www.justinewoods.com.

Presentation Abstracts
Session 1 Research Presentations

Gather in Beauty: Starting in a Good Way
Valerie St.Pierre Smith, Designer, Artist, Scholar, Owner of Beauty is Medicine

“We are showered every day with gifts, but they are not meant for us to keep. Their life is in their movement, the inhale and the exhale of our shared breath. Our work and our joy is to pass along the gift and to trust that what we put out into the universe will always come back.” (Robin Wall Kimmerer, 104.)

Within the context of English and colonized Western Euro-centric cultures, intention in creating and making is usually described in pseudo-objective, formal terms and relegated to describing a process or “inspiration.” In dress, it is often defined through functional relationships or designer whimsy. Rarely do we hear of intention as medicine, consider its energetic impact, or view intentional making as a gift. Drawing from ancestral teachings, as well as experience working with Indigenous sewists, beaders, artisans, and other makers, I’ve learned another way. A way that reframes intention and the making process; one that is interwoven with medicine, through sacred invocation of intention, from inception to completion. “Gather in Beauty” is an audio-visual performative presentation, inviting participants to pause, listen, and consider another way Intention lives in making and dressing.

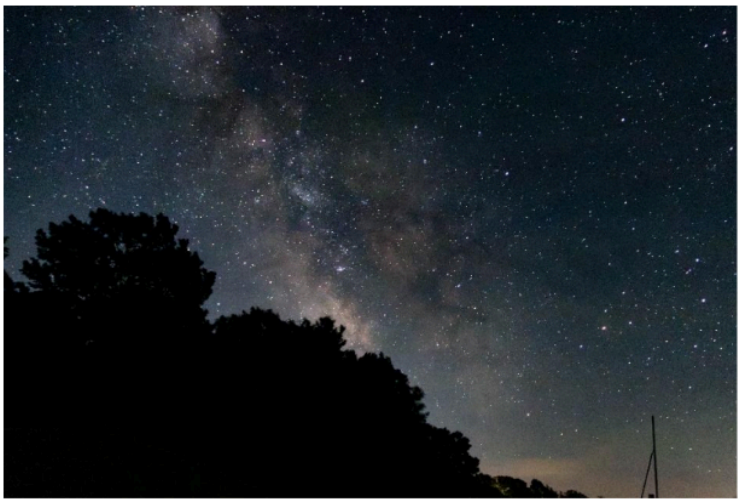

Fig. 1. “Night Sky” photo still from video slideshow for Beauty is Medicine. (Smith, 2024)

References

Smith, Noah. “Night Sky.” Gather in Beauty, Omaha, NE, August 2024. Video slideshow, approximately 6 min., 34 sec.

Wall Kimmerer, Robin 2013. Braiding Sweetgrass. Milkweed Editions.

Indigenous Land-Based Fashion as Healing
Shawkay Ottmann, Cornell University

Colonialism, enduring coloniality, the consequent genocides and attempted genocides that occurred, and suppression of Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies have had detrimental effects on Indigenous people's health and wellness. This can be seen in the continuing disparities between the health of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada and in Australia (Reading 2018, 3; Banham, Karnon and Lynch 2019, 2). Therefore, it is important to seek out Indigenous ways of healing – holistic renewal and restoration – to address the gross and egregious systemic-embedded disparities in culturally specific and meaningful ways. Land-based fashion practices are seen as form of healing and are an extension of land-based healing. Consequently, this study examined how making and wearing land-based fashion is healing and how this is embodied and experienced by Indigenous makers in Canada and Australia.

The methodologies used were Indigenous Storywork, cultural rhetorics, and film as Indigenous visual storywork to center Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies. Storywork conversations/interviews were conducted in Canada and Australia with artists, designers, and makers of land-based fashion around their making practices and the impact of wearing land-based garments. These conversations were filmed to create documentaries to highlight Indigenous storytelling and the visual nature of fashion. Additionally, thrivance was used as the theoretical framework. Thrivance, a concept by scholars Derek Jennings (Quapaw/Sac & Fox) and Jacqueline Ottmann (Anishinaabe), foregrounds Indigenous peoples' beauty, strength, joy and success rather than the struggle to survive. Thrivance "embodies Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, and centres and draws from the sophistication of Indigenous intellect and spirituality for wellness and complex challenges" (Jaqueline Ottmann, text message to author, November 2, 2023). It is an embodiment of sovereignty and "the state of already being self-determined" (Jaqueline Ottmann, text message to author, November 2, 2023). As we continue to face narratives of Indigenous pain, this focus on thrivance is important in recognizing hope actualized.

In Indigenous dress theory, "clothing is another environment rather than an ornament for the body" (Ottmann 2020). Thus, clothing is not simply adornment, but the first animate environment a person interacts with. Garments continue to hold the energy of the plants and animals used in its creation along with the spirit of the maker, who poured their energy into the garment through the long and careful creation process (West 2007, 11). Thus, land-based fashion can be a powerful site of renewal, restoration, and reclamation, as it emerges from and embodies Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies while also connecting with a worn, animate environment. This reclamation is an act of thrivance, as land-based fashion contests the complex challenges of colonialism/coloniality through asserting Indigenous intellect and spirituality for health and wellness, while creating joy through fashioning meaningful adornment and collaborative community work, the community extending to non-human kin.

References

Banham, David, Jonathan Karnon, and John Lynch. 2019. “Health Related Quality of Life (HRQoL) among Aboriginal South Australians: A Perspective Using Survey-Based Health Utility Estimates.” Health and Quality of Life Outcomes 17 (1): 1–9. doi:10.1186/s12955-019-1107-z.

Ottmann, Shawkay. 2020. “Indigenous Dress Theory and Dress in Canadian Residential Schools.” Fashion Studies 3, issue 1: article 5. Accessed 1 March 2023 https://doi.org/10.38055/FS030105.

Reading, Charlotte, 2018. “Structural Determinants of Aboriginal Peoples’ Health” in Determinants of Indigenous Peoples’ Health: Beyond the Social, eds. Margo Greenwood, Sarah de Leeuw, and Nicole Marie Lindsay, 3-18. Toronto: Canadian Scholars.

West, W. Richard Jr. 2007, “The Story the Dress Might Tell” Identity by Design: Tradition, Change, and Celebration in Native Women’s Dresses, ed. Emil Her Many Horses. New York: Collins, 11-13.

The Use of Clothing in Museum Displays on Native American Boarding Schools and Forced Assimilation

Echo Lorraine Malleo, Kent Historical Society

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the United States and Canadian governments instituted a series of policies designed to assimilate Native peoples into white-American culture. Part of this process involved the use of boarding schools across the United States as well as Canada, which separated Native children from their communities in an attempt to squash Native cultures (Fear-Segal and Rose 2016). Clothing was a key component of the boarding school era, as children were forbidden from wearing Native clothing and forced to adhere to a strict school uniform (Ottmann 2020). It was believed that if Native children wore Euro-American styled clothing, then they would accept Euro-American culture as superior and leave their Native past behind (Ottmann 2020). However, despite multiple attempts at cultural genocide by the United States and Canadian governments, Native peoples and cultures have survived.

Even though clothing was such an important part of the boarding school process, it is often not used during museum displays on the topic. Exhibits frequently display historical photographs of children from the schools, with or without discussion of the trauma surrounding the apparel they wear, but less frequently display the clothing itself. This presentation will showcase examples of how museums have successfully integrated clothing into discussion about boarding schools and forced assimilation, and how display of those objects drives home the emotional impact of such a heavy topic. The presentation includes both historical garments and those by contemporary designers referencing the subject. Since every museum visitor wears clothing, it can be used as a tool to help all viewers find connection to an exhibit's subject matter.

References

Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Susan D. Rose. 2016. "Introduction." In Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations. Lincoln:UNP - Nebraska

Shawkay Ottmann. 2020. "Indigenous Dress Theory and Dress in Canadian Residential Schools." Fashion Studies 3 (1). https://doi.org/10.38055/FS030105.

Film Showing (45 min.)

Quillworking And Memories with Agnes Mitchell

Sandra Tullio Pow, Toronto Metropolitan University

Quillwork is a time-honoured and intricate craft, dyed porcupine quills are used to create designs through weaving, plaiting, wrapping or stitching onto leather hides, baskets and bark boxes (Orchard, 1918). Traditions by their nature are passed on from one generation to another. Quillwork techniques were learned and practiced within guilds, with older members initiating younger ones into the practice (Bebbington, 1982). “Just as a building that is not kept in repair soon disintegrates, so traditions have to be worked at to be sustained. The continuity of tradition is due not to its passive inertia but to its active regeneration – in the tasks of carrying on” (Ingold & Hallam, 2007, p. 5-6). Looking through a historical lens, as contact with European traders increased, this complex, decorative art form with porcupine quills began to decline, “the coming of Europeans was ultimately to prove disastrous to the indigenous culture, and naturally the decorative arts suffered: four major quilling techniques virtually disappeared between the seventeenth and mid eighteenth centuries” (Whitehead, 1982, p. 15). Imported glass beads, ribbon and embroidery thread became the fashionable alternative to indigenous materials like quills (Thompson & Kritsch, 2005). Beads and embroidery threads were much easier to work with, more vibrant and colourfast in comparison to naturally dyed porcupine quills. Quillwork then became the delegated trademark of tourist’s souvenirs, most often on bark insertion boxes. To be profitably manufactured, multifaceted and time-consuming designs were modified into simpler geometric motifs, changing the richness and beauty of the artefacts. Given its importance to Canadian culture, this project documented quillwork techniques with the aim to preserve Indigenous knowledge and teach others this decorative art practice.

This video features Agnes (Andre) Mitchell, Gwichya Gwich’en elder and artist, currently living in Edmonton, Alberta, teaching historian Catherine C. Cole the quillwork techniques she learned while watching her mother make ‘wrap arounds’. Agnes was the youngest of twelve children born in Aklavik, Northwest Territories. She spent eight years in residential schools but cherished the time living on the land in Inuvik and Tsiigehtchic with her parents. Sharing her memories, Agnes teaches quill preparation including washing, dying, rinsing, clipping and flattening. Stitches for straight single quilling and overhand quilling with two quills are outlined as well as quillwork fringe on a leather strap. Examples of Agnes’ creative work are featured, and stories of her life are shared.

References

Bebbington, J. (1988). Quillwork of the Plains. The Glenbow Museum, Glenbow-Alberta Institute, Calgary, AB.

Ingold, T. & Hallam, E. (2007). Creativity and Cultural Improvisation: An Introduction. In E. Hallam and T. Ingold- (Eds.) Creativity and Cultural Improvisation (Vol. 44). Berg Publishers, New York.

Orchard, W. C. (1918). The technique of porcupine-quill decoration among the North American Indians (Vol. 4). Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.

Session 2 Research Presentations

"The Coat of the Age": The Kul-e-Tuk Parka, Inuit Cultural Appropriation and the Commercialization of Settler Canadian Identity

Alexis Walker, McCord Stewart Museum Montreal

In 1959, the Kul-e-Tuk brand parka made its debut on the Canadian market and was a near instant commercial success. Promoted as a quintessentially Canadian garment and a "homegrown" fashion product, the Kul-e-Tuk brand was a casual cold weather outerwear style for men, women and children that endured for decades. Through its affiliation with important cultural events like the annual Quebec Winter Carnival and the centennial celebrations of 1967, and sports organizations such as the Canadian Football League (CFL) and the national Winter Olympic team, the Kul-e-Tuk brand was a foundational element of mid-twentieth century settler Canadian identity. Erased from the triumph and substantial profits of the Kul-e-Tuk brand, however, were Inuit of the Western Arctic region of Nunavut, Inuvialuit, from whom the innovative parka design originated.

This research paper explores the complicated history of the Kul-e-Tuk brand, its appropriation from traditional Inuit men's qulittuqs, the role of key players from national department stores, Montreal's garment manufacturing industry and DuPont of Canada in its development and diffusion, and the matrix of factors that contributed to its high profile, becoming what the Hudson's Bay Company called "the coat of the age" (HBC 1959). This work argues that fashion products labelled as Canadian with Indigenous roots are not the result of cross-cultural inspiration, appreciation, or innocent curiosity. Appropriations like the Kul-e-Tuk brand are powerful tools of colonialism, bearing witness to how, in settler states like Canada, the theft of land and cultural belongings function in tandem to control and erase Indigenous people while simultaneously transferring their identity onto, and their resource rich territories into the hands of settler Canadians.

This qualitative research draws on archival sources, with a focus on Kul-e-Tuk brand advertisements, promotional articles and imagery published in primarily Canadian, and to a lesser extent American newspapers and magazines from the late 1950s to the start of the 1980s. Extant Kul-e-Tuk brand garments, sourced and collected by the author between 2020 and 2024, and traditional Inuit animal skin examples in museum collections serve as the basis for additional object-based study. Oral history research with descendants of a Hudson's Bay Company trading post factor credited as the "inventor" of the style trace the garment's transformation from its Indigenous origins to a mass-market fashion product. Vintage resale websites were investigated to survey generic Inuit-style parkas that were manufactured in North America throughout the era, revealing that the Kul-e-Tuk was not an isolated case of cultural offense, but part of a broader trend for appropriated Arctic outerwear. Finally, contemporary secondary sources contextualize the Kul-e-Tuk brand's phenomenal success in relation to Canada's socio-political climate and settler colonial identity projects at the time and to support critical analysis.

This original work broadens understandings of Canada's historic and ongoing colonial processes at work, and the crafting of appropriated settler Canadian identity through the nationalistic branding and marketing of winter fashion products with Indigenous origins during the twentieth century.

References

Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), 1959. "The Bay Leads in Fashion." The Star Phoenix, October 26, 12.

Fig. 1. Lydia of Montreal, Woman's Kul-e-Tuk brand parka, nylon fleece and fur, Autumn-Winter 1959. Author's collection.

Plateau Beaded Bags: Cultural Noise for Yakama Artist and Museum Collections
Jenise Sileo, Librarian and Independent Researcher

The Plateau beaded bags are hand-made fashion accessories that reflect the social, economic, and cultural changes experienced by the Yakama* women during the late [1]nineteenth and early twentieth century. This paper examines the impact of the bags on the Yakima Valley Museum (YVM) and how they inspire future Yakama women artists. Plateau beaded bags consist of a front and back panel, fabric lining and binding, and have two buckskin handles. What makes them unique is that each one is decorated with a one-of-a-kind colorful beadwork pattern. For this paper, I combined object analysis of 150 bags in the YVM collection with critical observations made from other local museum exhibits, and I conducted personal interviews with Yakama artisan, HollyAnna CougarTracks DeCoteau LittleBull, who added context to the bags with her personal stories, her beaded bags, and with her background knowledge.

To make sense of all the information gathered from the analysis, I built an Excel spreadsheet where each line represented an individual bag and documented the donors, geographical origin, manufacture date, and any provenance history from the museum's database. I included the statistical analysis of the fabrics and noted any additional decorations such as fringe, shells, or brass tacks. The memorabilia found inside the bags defined their intrinsic value for the Yakama women as gifts, raffles, and prizes. The women used theses bags for monetary purposes during community events and traditional games of chance, and the Hudson Bay Company store marketed them in their storefronts for profit. I defined what is a signature bead and highlighted their contribution to what LittleBull says, "cultural noise," the culture of making things.

For Mike Siebol, the museum director, these artifacts document the creative spirit of the Yakama women and contribute to the town's history, but at the same time, Siebol acknowledges their impact on the education, curation, and preservation practices. The bags on display speak to the collection practices and the ones in the back are stored inside archival units designed to protect them from light, dust, and insects. LittleBull utilizes the collection for inspiration for her pieces of art, which confirms what Sherry Farrell-Racette said, "many artists use museum collections as a means to reconnect with their artistic legacy, and there they find objects that have preserved artistic principles, aesthetic standards and skilled techniques." (Farrell-Racette 2009, 309) This paper was for my graduate work; however, the process I used could be pivotal for continued research on Indigenous American fashions and how they impact local museum practices.

References

Farrell-Racette, Sherry. 2009. "Looking for Stories and Unbroken Threads: Museum Artifacts as Women's History and Cultural Legacy." In Restoring the Balance: First Nations Women, Community, and Culture, edited by Eric Guimond, Gail G. Valaskakis and Madeleine D. Stout. University of Manitoba Press.

[1] Spelling Note: "Yakima" means the geographic location and "Yakama" refers to the Yakama Tribal Indians. (http://www.critfc.org accessed September 14, 2022).

Fig. 1. Yakima Valley Museum, Display Case, Oct 2021.

Fig. 2. HollyAnna CougarTracks DeCoteau LittleBull, Artist, Oct 2021.

Animating Language, Animating Dress: Reworking English Language Influences on Our Understanding of Dress

Valerie St.Pierre Smith, Designer, Artist, Scholar, Owner of Beauty is Medicine

Dress simultaneously expresses and reflects embodied being in this world. Yet whether in critique, discourse, study, description, observation, or general discussion, the hierarchical and often inanimate language structure of English, coupled with the illusion of objectivity, carries inherent biases, and often falls short of truly translating the meaning carried within dress itself. As I began my journey of learning my ancestors' language, Anishnaabemowin, I found the animacy inherent in the language and word structure more deeply conveyed the knowledge, wisdom and understandings imparted by it than ever I found in English translations. As Anton Treuer shares, regarding the power of Anishnaabemowin:

> "…the knowledge contained within the language, [expresses] the unique Ojibwe worldview and way of thinking, the Anishnaabe connection to the past, the Earth, and the future."
> (Treuer, 2023, 5)

By extension, it also deepened my understanding of, and relationship with, the Anishinaabe reciprocal lifeways expressed through our material culture. Ojibwe elder and author, Basil Johnston, notes:

> "If the Native Peoples and their heritage are to be understood, it is their beliefs, insights, concepts, ideals, values, attitudes, and codes that must be studied. And there is, I submit, no better way of gaining that understanding than by examining native ceremonies, rituals, songs, dances, prayers, and stories. For it is in ceremony, ritual, song, dance, and prayer that the sum total of what people believe about life, being, existence, and relationships, are symbolically expressed and articulated; as it is in story, fable, legends, and myth that fundamental understandings, insights, and attitudes toward life and human conduct, character, and quality in their diverse forms are embodied and passed on." (Johnston 1990, 7)

And while English relies on a hierarchical, human-on-top relationship with the world, Anishnaabemowin is built upon a circular, familial, animate being understanding of the world. Consequently, I also began to see just how much was lost, and could be gained, in texts and discourse on dress by our reworking our translation approaches; branching out from a "translated into English" mechanism, where the original language is made to fit into English, to one that centers the original language, intent and meaning.

"Animating Language, Animating Dress…" explores some potential ways of reworking English language and translation concepts through the lens of Anishnaabemowin to deepen our understanding and meanings of dress.

Fig. 1. Illustration (author, 2025) highlighting an example of deeper meaning and knowledge carried within a more accurate translation from Anishnaabemowin into what English refers to as strawberry (@james.vukelich, September 30, 2017).

References

Johnston, Basil (Bison Edition) 1990. Ojibway Heritage. University of Nebraska Press.
James Vukelich. 2017. “Ojibwe Word of the Day Ode'imin ᐅᑌᑊᐃᒥᓐ 'A strawberry literally: a heartberry.'” YouTube, September 30, 2017.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WD7o6eIiyPc

Treuer, Anton, ed. 2023. Living Our Language: Ojibwe Tales and Oral Histories. Minnesota Historical Society Press.

Friday, November 7, 2025

Session 3 Research Presentations

Yahoo/Yeehaw: Cowboy Culture in the Asian Diaspora
Charlene K. Lau, Independent Scholar

For generations, the constructed identity of the “Marlboro Man” has set the tone for Western and Midwestern masculinity in both Canada and the United States. But what happens when this archetype rubs up against non-white immigrants and global diasporas across indigenous lands in the contemporary moment? Widely celebrated festivals such as the Calgary Stampede serve as a stomping ground for visitors from multiple cultures and religions to mix, donning costumes of cowboy hats, denimwear, cowboy boots and bandanas. This midwestern cosplay seemingly does not discriminate, and points to the very image of cowboy culture as a modern invention. At the same time, artists from Asian diasporas have taken the cowboy as a character and point of reference to examine masculinity, softness and belonging. This lecture looks at film, video and photography from contemporary artists who distill the essence of the so-called “Wild West” into a fever dream, a moment which simultaneously questions the intersections of gender identity, sexuality and race. Recent works such as Jingjing Tian’s Cowboy Joe (2019) Kenneth Tam’s video and photo installation Silent Spikes (2021) trouble the idea of male representation onscreen and who gets to participate in popular culture’s male imaginary. Perhaps the cowboy or cowgirl costume can be for all, a means in which to inhabit another world, another place, no matter who you are.

Teaching Global, Learning Local: A Field Trip to an International Market
Sara Wilcox, University of Minnesota

Experiential learning and community partnership are key methods for encouraging students to connect their classroom learning with real-world skills for a more holistic education. Kolb (1984) identified four stages of the experiential learning cycle: active experimentation, concrete experience, reflective observation, and abstract conceptualization. Ideally, these stages happen in a continuous spiral. Integrating community partners in education includes recognizing their lived experiences as a valuable source of knowledge for students, and building relationships that benefit the community partners and the students (Suarez-Balcazar et al. 2004). Experiential learning and community partnership may be especially beneficial for cultural learning.

St. Catherine University's course Sociocultural Aspects of Dress is cross-listed with fashion and cultural studies designations. Course learning outcomes include developing multicultural competency through interaction and communication with a culturally diverse community, and analyzing the interrelationship of multiple aspects of culture that influence dress and the fashion industry to develop a sociocultural vocabulary. This paper describes an innovative Cultural Experience project that combines experiential learning and community partnership to accomplish these objectives.

The focus of the Cultural Experience assignment was a class field trip to the Midtown Global Market, an international indoor market that includes clothing and textile merchants from Tibet, Morocco, Mexico, and East Africa. The goal of taking a field trip to the market was to connect a meaningful cultural experience directly to aspects of dress through the related merchants at the market and to partner with a community organization that was promoting cultural awareness. Students signed up for groups to interview one of the four merchants, and each group was assigned to prepare a list of questions that centered on the merchant's culture and how the dress items in their shop related to or expressed the culture.

During the field trip, students documented their experiences through photographs so that they could create social media posts promoting the shops to be posted on the market's Facebook and Instagram pages. The intention of this portion of the assignment was to provide publicity for the merchants in consideration of the need for reciprocity in community partnerships (Suarez-Balcazar et al. 2004).

Following the field trip, students were asked to reflect on their experience and its impact on their learning in a PowerPoint, poster, or video. Students commented that they found interviewing the merchants and discussing cultural dress from their countries to be a meaningful and enjoyable experience that enhanced their cultural competency and knowledge of aspects of culture that influence dress.

This project completed one full spiral of the experiential learning cycle by experimenting with interview questions in advance, experiencing the field trip itself, reflecting on the knowledge gained, and analyzing its impact on their learning (Kolb 1984). Learning from the merchants through interviews and reciprocating with social media posts modeled mutually beneficial relationships important for community partnerships (Suarez-Balcazar et al. 2004). Similar field trips that combine experiential learning and community partnership may be beneficial to students for enhancing their understanding of cultural aspects of dress.

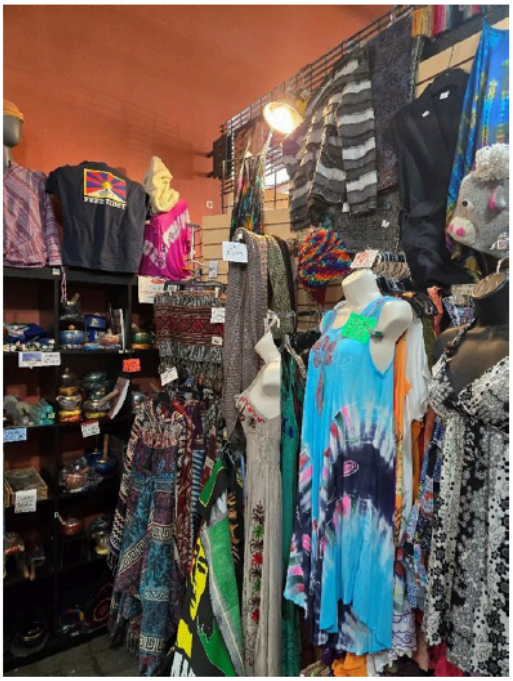

Fig. 1 and Fig. 2. Photos taken by students showing the shops at the market, used with permission.

References

Kolb, David A. 1984. Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development. Prentice-Hall.

Suarez-Balcazar, Yolanda, Margaret I Davis, Joseph Ferrari, Philip Nyden, Bradley Olson, Josefina Alvarez, Paul Molloy, et al. 2004. “University-Community Partnerships: A Framework and an Exemplar.” In Participatory Community Research: Theories and Methods in Action, 105–20. American Psychological Association. doi:10.1037/10726-006.

Dress and the Construction of Place Identity Among Enslaved Individuals: A Historical and Cultural Analysis

Taiwo Bamidele, University of Nebraska

Aside from its practical use, clothing acts as a powerful way of expressing identity, social roles, and cultural ties (White and White, 1995, p. 42). For enslaved people, dress functioned as a tool of racial repression and a means of asserting identity and agency within restrictive environments. This research examines how enslaved individuals used clothing to either distinguish or unify themselves across plantations and how dress was employed in post-slavery identity reconstruction. It utilized a narrative approach, analyzing archival and primary sources such as historical newspapers, magazines, journals, enslaved people's narratives, advertisements, and plantation records. These sources were accessed through the University of Nebraska Library.

The study was guided by dress theory, which posits that the link between clothing and identity is influenced by geography, cultural traditions, and symbols. This theory emphasizes how dress served as a connection between the physical spaces of slavery and the imagined realms of freedom and remembrance (Eicher & Roach-Higgins, 1992, p. 12).

This study shows that dress served as a visual symbol of social hierarchy that distinguished enslavers from the enslaved and maintained control over enslaved people (Stuckey, 1987, p. 34). Dresses worn by enslaved individuals are generally uniform, coarse, and practical, but strictly regulated (Foster, 1997, p. 61). These roughly textured dyed/undyed fabrics were distributed seasonally by slave owners in ways that suppressed individuality and expression.

While standardization was enforced, noticeable differences in the dress of enslaved individuals were evident, depending on the tasks they performed. House slaves' clothing was usually inferior, secondhand, differentiating their roles from those of farm workers. As a unifying symbol, the clothing of enslaved people communicated a visual language of defiance and cultural remembrance (Handler & Steiner 2009, p. 41). Therefore, African fabrics such as indigo-dyed textiles, head wraps, and other embellishments were revised in the Americas as a visual connection to their heritage. Amid fabric scarcity, enslaved people creatively altered their garments using embroidery, patchwork, and symbolic accessories. Based on historical visual records and notices of fugitive slaves, self-modification involved using pins, beads, and colored trims as a way of expressing individuality in the face of enforced uniformity (Weekly Anglo-African 1861, p. 4).

During the post-slavery era, Western dress styles were adopted for conformity, freedom, and dignity. This era witnessed noticeable changes in how previously enslaved individuals used clothing for self-expression and social commentary in public engagement spaces, demonstrating their involvement in public life while defining a new sense of self. The Black community later utilized seamstressing, tailoring, and millinery skills acquired in bondage to establish businesses that contributed to financial independence and heritage preservation (Weekly Anglo-African 1861, p. 5).

In conclusion, even in slavery, clothing became a vehicle of creative expression and to reconstruct a sense of self and society. This study contributes to the understanding of the complex narrative of slavery's lived truths and the persistent role of dress in constructing and challenging identity across various periods and locations.

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Session 4 Research Presentations

Dressed for Agency: A Black Woman's Journey from a Chicago Housing Project to New York's Runways
Ci Phillips, Mahogany at 50

This research expands on the concepts of photographs as sites of evidence and alternative style narratives by Carol Tulloch, as well as Blackgirl autoethnography by Robin B. Boylorn, to recognize the Black body as an archive and intentionally bring Black autobiographical memory into the fashion studies discipline. It is a creative, historical, and personal storytelling about my relationship with the world through the lens of fashion and style. Examining personal family photo albums to tell the story of Black life in Stateway Gardens—a former public housing project in Chicago, IL—from 1972 to 2007. I explore personal style and memory as socioemotional tools that both reflect and shape Black life—beginning with the self, then spilling over into the collective, institutional, and imagined.

I offer my own experience as a Black woman from Chicago studying fashion in New York. I ask how one activates and develops their unique Black, creative consciousness by using style and personal history to research themselves and their communities. How does one learn to express their cultural identity in spaces where they are often unseen, marginalized, or misrepresented? This lecture invites the public to learn about Black Chicago and its public housing history through my own autoethnographic research from growing up in Stateway Gardens to later in life entering predominantly white institutions with a critical awareness of how cultural identity shapes our style and self-perception.

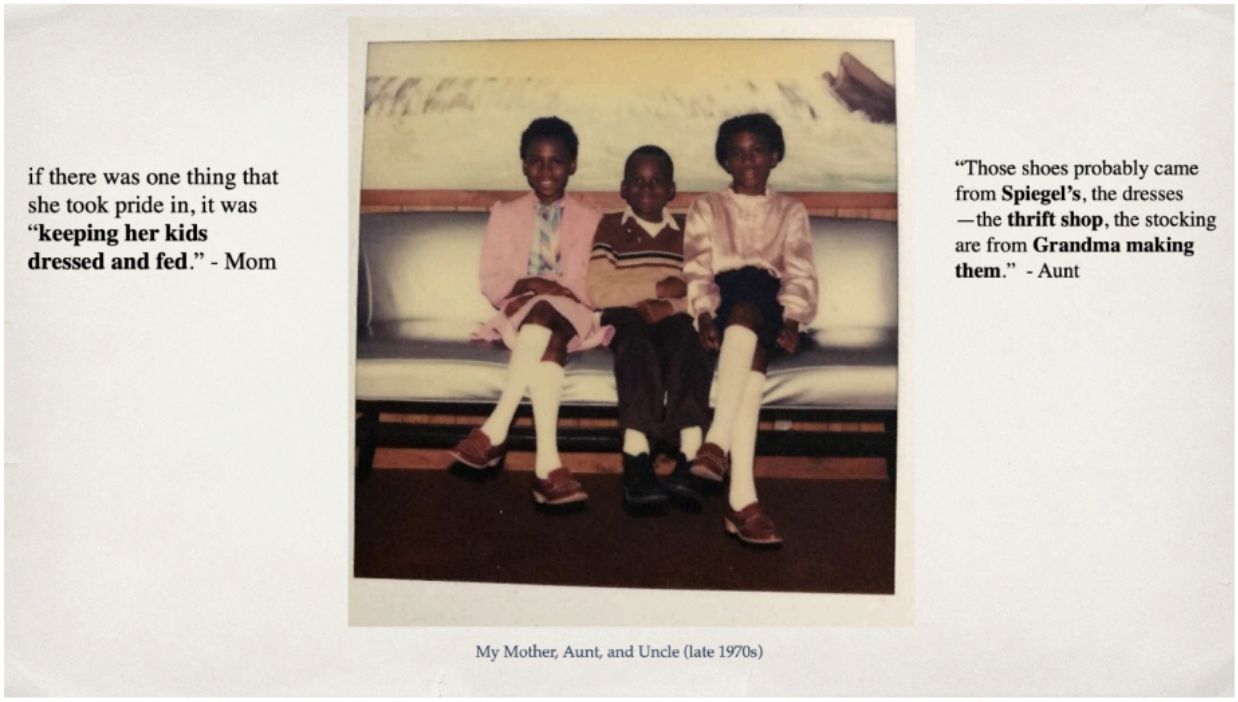

Fig. 1 Image from personal album.

Combining family albums, interviews, and various scholarly references, I position style and dress as liberatory tools of survival, relief, protection, and redemption. Ultimately, I contend that the body—when dressed, styled, and remembered—offers a site of resistance, where Blackgirls can study and assert themselves, free from the constraints of social, academic, or institutional prejudices (Boylorn 2016, 55). I write and speak candidly—sometimes simple, sometimes in prose, academically, then QUICK, back in vernacular—so that other Black or less fortunate people don't have such a hard time finding and accessing style narratives about their culture in the archives. I believe style and dress is one of the most accessible ways to advocate for agency, intersectionality, and question normative scholarship.

Keywords: Black Style Narratives, Blackgirl Autoethnography, Chicago Fashion, Fashion Studies, Stateway Gardens, Chicago Public Housing

Sex in the Windy City:
Burlesque star Sally Rand, her feather fans, and the Chicago History Museum
Jessica Pushor, Chicago History Museum

Imagine asking a famous entertainer to donate part of their stage costume, a signature piece that helped catapult them to international stardom, they generously agree, only for your institution to decline the donation at the last moment for not containing enough historical significance. This presentation will discuss how we here at the Chicago History Museum (CHM) previously made this error, what we learned from this mistake, how we rectified it 20 years later, and what we continue to learn from it as we refine our collection to represent all of Chicago's history and peoples. It is a fascinating story about one of the most famous burlesque stars in history and her interaction with Chicago's oldest cultural institution.



Sally Rand (1904 – 1979) was born Helen Gould Beck in Elkton, Missouri. In 1933, she began a residency at the Chicago World's Fair where her performances at the Streets of Paris Cafe de la Paix stage would make her both famous and infamous. Rand's routine involved two large white ostrich feather fans that she used to obscure her possibly nude body as she danced to "Clair de lune". This fan dance soon came under the scrutiny of local authorities who characterized it as lewd and lascivious. In September of 1933 Sally Rand was convicted and fined for willfully performing an obscene and indecent dance in a public place, which only increased attendance at her shows. It is estimated that at least two million people came to Chicago and saw Sally Rand's fan dance at the World's Fair.

In 1944, the Chicago History Museum reached out to Sally Rand and asked if she would donate her famous fans to the institution. Rand agreed, but soon after the Trustees of the Museum held an emergency meeting and rescinded their request, claiming the fans were not of enough historical value. It took more than 20 years for the Museum to learn from this mistake, but in 1966 they again contacted Miss Rand, this time to admit to and apologize for their mistake. They asked if she would consider donating her fans to the institution once again and, to her credit, Sally Rand graciously agreed to donate a pair of her fans to the Chicago History Museum.

In 2022, the Chicago History Museum was fortunate enough to host another world-famous burlesque entertainer, Dita Von Teese, for a research visit to view the Sally Rand collection. This visit led to a rediscovery of Rand's story with the institution and to the subsequent display of her fans in our exhibition Dressed in History. It provided a unique opportunity to relate her accomplishments, highlight her connection to the city and the institution itself, and highlight how we continue to learn from our mistakes and reevaluate the objects that tell the history of Chicago and its people.

Best Dressed Man on the Football Field

Leigh Southward, University of Arkansas

When you see a college football player in uniform, several thoughts come to mind. 1) School pride and traditions 2) Ambition and dedication based on hours and years of physical and mental training, and 3) Team spirit due to school colors, logos and mascots. Uniforms also symbolize unity and culture. These men in uniform reflect the university's program style and personality. A student athlete at a midsouth university, introduced himself on the first day of class as "the best dressed man on the football field." From an average spectator's perspective, every player on the team looks alike. They are all wearing a jersey, pants, shoulder pads and a helmet. I wanted to know more, so I interviewed him, and he walked me through all his gear for the big game. With a closer look, there is a lot of variation.

In college football, uniforms are governed by NCAA rules and school/team guidelines. All teams must follow these guidelines for safety and consistency (National Collegiate Athletic Association 2024, Rule 1-4-4). What is required and what is optional for a player's uniform? Helmets are required and must meet safety standards of (NOCSAE) (National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment 2020). Team colors and logos on helmets must be consistent.The jersey must have the player's number on the front and back, along with the school/team's name.

Shoulder pads must be worn under the jersey. The pads may include rib protectors and a back plate, and extra padding for the neck. Pants must cover the knees and should be team-issued.Thigh pads are worn inside the pants but may be customized to be seen from the outside. Player's shoes must meet field surface requirements and are generally team issued. However, players may select and pay for their shoes as long as they meet certain standards. They must not come from a competitor of the school's apparel sponsor, and they must be official team colors. The interviewee paid for his shoes instead of the standard ones provided by the team. (See Figure 1).

Many pieces of the college football uniform are optional or customizable. Gloves are not required but often worn. They may be team issued or personalized if they meet grip/safety rules. Arm sleeves may be worn for muscle support or personal style. Helmets may have visors added to reduce glare and towels may be tucked into the front or back of the pants. The interviewee wears a streamer towel. (See Figure 2). Mouthguards are optional but strongly recommended, and some players wear colored mouthguards, often in the opposing team's colors. Players may choose custom socks, wristbands, or eye black. Depending on the position, players may wear turf tape on their knees or the sides of their arms.

College football uniforms strike a balance between standardized requirements and personalized team identity. The NCAA strictly regulates mandatory components to ensure player safety and consistency across programs. Optional accessories like visors, gloves, and arm sleeves, allow players to express individuality and school pride.

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Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Keeping Our Stories Alive: The Collection and Care of Dress in the ArQuives
Patrick Taylor, ArQuives

The ArQuives is the single largest independent LGBTQ2+ Archives in the world and the only archive of its kind in Canada collecting at a national level. Founded in 1973 this unique community driven archive has amassed an artifact collection of over 8,000 alongside its extensive archive of textual, photographic, and audio visual documentation of the queer liberation movement across turtle island. The collection of objects housed within the ArQuives is varied, encompassing every element of material culture as it relates to the lived experiences of queer individuals. Within the collection, dress is heavily represented, reflecting the deep and embodied connection between dress and the construction of self and identity.

Through the material culture of donated dress, this presentation will address topics of queer identity, gendered performance, and the importance of community archiving of queer materials. Items such as drag costumes, gogo dancing outfits, leather gear and jewelry pertaining to the The International Imperial Court System (IICS), speak to the creative, subversive, and inventive use of dress across the queer community, each created within their own unique subculture. Additionally an extensive collection of t-shirts, buttons, pins and other mass produced items of dress related to protest and mobilization demonstrate the use of dress as a tool of visual solidarity.

Dress has long been used as a covert signifier of queerness, used to communicate with others within the community. Items of apparel such as coloured handkerchiefs carry semiotic significance when worn in particular fashions, transmuting innocuous elements of daily dress into an unwritten language of desire. These objects of fashion only take on such semiotic meaning when worn by certain individuals, therefore their significance is easily dismissed in traditional collecting practices. By creating an archive of queer people by queer people, The ArQuives is able to supply additional narrative and context behind artifacts, otherwise ignored or misinterpreted by traditional archival institutions.

This queering of traditional archiving practices emphasizes a person first and community first approach to the archival process, honoring the wishes of donors above all and centering their lived experiences and embodied relationship with their garments once they have entered into the collection. This is reflected in both curatorial and conservation decisions undertaken within the collection, such as preserving the garments worn by the victim of a gay bashing incident in the condition they were in when removed from his body after the attack. While many of these decisions are not entirely unique to a queer collection, they highlight the importance of a community archive unencumbered by institutional frameworks which divorce context from artifacts and seek to present them in a static fashion. Rather, the ArQuives embrace the complex and messy nature of material culture and the ephemera of queer identity, preserving stories and biographies otherwise ignored or erased.