



## Stylin': African American Expressive Culture, from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit

By Shane White, Graham White

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For over two centuries, in the North as well as the South, both within their own community and in the public arena, African Americans have presented their bodies in culturally distinctive ways. Shane White and Graham White consider the deeper significance of the ways in which African Americans have dressed, walked, danced, arranged their hair, and communicated in silent gestures. They ask what elaborate hair styles, bright colors, bandanas, long watch chains, and zoot suits, for example, have really meant, and discuss style itself as an expression of deep-seated cultural imperatives. Their wide-ranging exploration of black style from its African origins to the 1940s reveals a culture that differed from that of the dominant racial group in ways that were often subtle and elusive. A wealth of black-and-white illustrations show the range of African American experience in America, emanating from all parts of the country, from cities and farms, from slave plantations, and Chicago beauty contests. White and White argue that the politics of black style is, in fact, the politics of metaphor, always ambiguous because it is always indirect. To tease out these ambiguities, they examine extensive sources, including advertisements for runaway slaves, interviews recorded with surviving ex-slaves in the 1930s, autobiographies, travelers' accounts, photographs, paintings, prints, newspapers, and images drawn from popular culture, such as the stereotypes of Jim Crow and Zip Coon.

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**Stylin': African American Expressive Culture, from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit** By Shane White, Graham White **Bibliography**

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### **Editorial Review**

#### Amazon.com Review

We know of the music, literature, and athletic exploits of black Americans, but most historians of Afro-American influence on American culture never emphasize the modes of expression, vernacular, color schemes, and hairstyles that everyone picks up on. That's where Australian professors Shane and Graham White come in, with a long-overdue look at how black fashions were absorbed into U.S. and world culture from the arrival of the first slaves up to the 1940s. Using photos, illustrations, recordings, advertisements, and other sources, they catalog a number of influential black cultural phenomena, from the antebellum clothes of 18th-century South Carolina slaves to the famed "zoot suit" explosion of the 1940s. --*Eugene Holley Jr.*

#### From Publishers Weekly

As this brisk, illuminating survey amply documents, African American culture?from the 19th-century dandy mocked by whites to today's baggy hip-hop clothing?has helped make black survival possible in America, both as link to the homeland and as voice of resistance. Using material as varied as runaway slave advertisements, autobiographies, beauty-contest fliers and sociological surveys, these Australian scholar brothers bring to vivid life "the way in which, over more than two centuries, ordinary black men and women developed a style that did indeed affirm their lives." At times, such affirmation worked through parody (uneasily sensed by whites, if only subconsciously); at others it expressed itself directly in pride in fine dress or beauty contests. Slavery's totalitarian domination might be mitigated through the brightly colored patchwork clothing one former slave suggests this in her desire "to look pretty sniptious"); in the North, free black men and women fought for the dignity that intolerant whites strained to deny them by claiming a right to street life. During Reconstruction, in contrast, former slaves paraded through white sections of town to signal communal pride in Emancipation or, later, put on their finery and promenaded in the Saturday-night "Stroll." By the time the book reaches 1940s zoot-suiters, its claims for the vital role played by African American expressive culture seem entirely undeniable; this well-researched and engaging history pulls together a mostly untold story with as much verve as the swinging dandies it depicts. 19 drawings; 37 b&w photos.

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#### From Library Journal

The authors (both history, Univ. of Sydney, Australia) conceived and wrote this work in their homeland, providing an outsider's fresh perspective on the African American cultural milieu. Sifting through photographs, paintings, interviews, and surveys, they detail how blacks from the slavery era to World War II developed a self-affirming, expressive body style that differentiated them from the larger society and was manifested in clothing, hairstyles, dance, gestures, and other personal attributes. The authors argue that the politics of "black" style was the embodiment of ambiguity, acting as a subtle jab to the dominant racial group. Several of the chapters have appeared previously in scholarly journals and a monograph.

Recommended for larger public and academic libraries with African American collections. ?Michael A.

Lutes, Univ. of Notre Dame Libs., South Bend, IN

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### **Users Review**

#### **From reader reviews:**

**Arthur Pascual:**

Why don't make it to be your habit? Right now, try to prepare your time to do the important action, like looking for your favorite e-book and reading a e-book. Beside you can solve your problem; you can add your knowledge by the guide entitled Stylin': African American Expressive Culture, from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit. Try to stumble through book Stylin': African American Expressive Culture, from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit as your pal. It means that it can to become your friend when you feel alone and beside that of course make you smarter than ever before. Yeah, it is very fortunated for yourself. The book makes you far more confidence because you can know anything by the book. So , let's make new experience and knowledge with this book.

**James Edwards:**

Playing with family in the park, coming to see the coastal world or hanging out with close friends is thing that usually you will have done when you have spare time, in that case why you don't try factor that really opposite from that. One activity that make you not sensation tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you are ride on and with addition details. Even you love Stylin': African American Expressive Culture, from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit, you are able to enjoy both. It is fine combination right, you still need to miss it? What kind of hang type is it? Oh can occur its mind hangout people. What? Still don't have it, oh come on its identified as reading friends.

**Terry Matlock:**

The book untitled Stylin': African American Expressive Culture, from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit contain a lot of information on it. The writer explains the woman idea with easy means. The language is very simple to implement all the people, so do definitely not worry, you can easy to read that. The book was compiled by famous author. The author will bring you in the new era of literary works. You can actually read this book because you can please read on your smart phone, or device, so you can read the book throughout anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can open their official web-site as well as order it. Have a nice examine.

**Charles Branch:**

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