Fashion Trends: A Reflection of Our Political Culture

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Abstract:
Change is a theme that is ever-present in American political culture and often this change is reflected in the dress of its people. Using fashion as a way of emphasizing change in our political culture, this unit will seek to help students explore the indisputable connection between the two. With opportunities to examine the way we dress at the individual, group, societal, and cultural levels, it will also afford students a barometer by which they might gauge the present state of our American political culture.

This unit, which is appropriate for grades 8-12, with minor adaptations, will require students to research various eras in European and American history that exemplify periods of dramatic social and political change. The lessons/activities will allow them to examine the fashion fads and trends that paralleled major political events and/or changes in political attitudes during these eras, in order to make relevant connections. The eras to be studied will include (1) the “classical” era, from the European Renaissance to the American Colonial and Revolutionary Periods, (2) the 19th century through the Industrial Revolution and the early 20th century “industrial’ era, and (3) the “postindustrial” era of the latter half of the 20th century.