

*Politics through T-Shirts: A History of Protest*, a Study of Digital Public History Methodologies  
and Open-Source Curating

by

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### **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## Abstract

The T-shirt, as it exists in the twenty-first century, is a staple in every wardrobe across the United States. Since its rise to popularity in the 1950s, it has been used as a symbol of rebellion and dissent of the youth. *Politics Through T-Shirts: A History of Protest*, is a narrative driven digital exhibition that examines the transformation of the T-shirt from a humble utilitarian garment into a means of protest. It exists as a mediator between fashion and social movements, an exemplifier of the ever changing context of ordinary clothing in North American society. *Protest Through T-Shirts* demonstrates both the benefits of digital exhibitions as well as its detriments. This thesis addresses the development of fashion curation and the digital methods used to display clothing. The importance of ordinary clothing is becoming more apparent as the apparel industry continues to grow. Clothing is something that connects us all, as the first thing we do every morning is get dressed.

Key words: Public history; digital public history; open-source curating; fashion curation; fashion history; history of the T-shirt; online exhibition

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to all my family and friends, who never doubted my dreams or my ability to achieve them.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The origins of the modern-day museum can be connected to early institutions of knowledge in great civilizations past. From the great Library of Alexandria in Ancient Rome, to the individual cabinets of curiosities owned by noblemen in the eighteenth century, to the opening of contemporary galleries such as the MoMA in 1929. They serve as temples of art, houses of memory and institutions of education. This evolution resulted in the modern-day museum. The principles of collection, preservation, education, interpretation and exhibition for the benefit of the public are today paramount to any institution's identity.<sup>1</sup> These principles were sealed with the development of formal museum studies in the nineteenth century, but their application has changed dramatically as the field has continued to evolve.<sup>2</sup> Museums remain a varied and complex element of the study of history, both for the academics that work within them and the communities they aim to engage. The individual size of a museum varies, in collection, buildings and staff, all of which influences an institutions ability to serve. Museums are constantly in a state of flux, with their administrators wondering how to best suit the needs of the public, while remaining true to the hallowed principles on which it is mandated. In March 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the question became, what happens when a museum cannot host the public at all?

This thesis is an attempt to answer that very question. As a result of the ongoing pandemic, I was unable to fulfill an internship at the Museum of Vancouver during the summer of 2020. Needing to realign my thesis project, the opportunity to create a digital exhibition emerged. The topic -- the history of the protest T-shirt -- not only encompassed a personal

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<sup>1</sup> Edward P. Alexander, Mary Alexander. *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums*, (Altimira Press: 2008), 8

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 10.

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interest in modern American history and fashion history, but was inspired by the surge of Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020. Seeking to find something meaningful in a thesis topic within the realm of fashion and style, the creation of relevant T-shirts to protest the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor inspired an enquiry into the origins of a garment that could silently align a wearer with a cause they cared about. The resulting online exhibition, *Politics Through T-Shirts: A History of Protest*, was created using a combination of open-access platforms and published scholarly written works about the relationship of fashion and protest. I call this method open-access curation, as it emphasizes the use of digitized resources from museum collections and archives, as well as relevant media and scholarly works easily accessed through the web.

This thesis begins with a literature review on the academic understanding of the T-shirt in Chapter 2, not only its chronical history but the broader analysis of its social and cultural importance in 20<sup>th</sup> century North American society. The development of fashion curation in digital history and identifying where these two factions of history have overlapped before is discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 is dedicated to an analysis of the website, *Politics Through T-Shirts: A History of Protest*, open-source curation and the process of assembling an entirely digital exhibition while isolating from the novel coronavirus. The essays written for each of the online exhibition's respective sections are included in Chapter 6. Corresponding screen captures of *Politics Through T-Shirts: A History of Protest* are included in Appendix A.

Although there are undeniable benefits to digital exhibitions, they cannot be considered an equivalent replacement to their physical counterpart. Such digital projects are a simulation of reality, an impression or representation of the immersion the viewer experiences between the

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walls of a museum. My thesis argues that technology is best used as an accessory to museum studies, implemented in small parts to amplify context and narrative. *Politics Through T-Shirts* was created as a product of its time, as being unable to access physical collections left little choice but to take this avenue of curation. COVID-19 will leave lasting impacts on all industries, including the museum and heritage sector. A time free from the novel coronavirus is still on the horizon, and it is only at that time that we will fully be able to analyze the full effects of a global pandemic on the public's access to and interpretations of history.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Academic research into the T-shirt is relatively new. A majority of the materials sourced for the creation of the exhibition were published within the last ten years. The connection between fashion and social movements remains in its infancy, which could be attributed to the young state of fashion curation and fashion history in general. More analysis will be included in the Museology section. Of the published works that do exist on the T-shirt, a majority focuses on its reflection of popular culture and the zeitgeist, as well as archiving its collectible and uniform nature.

In *Slogan T-Shirts: Cult and Culture* (2014), Stephanie Talbot tackles the multi-faceted nature of the T-shirt by interviewing thirty commentators that influence the understanding of the T-shirt.<sup>3</sup> The history of the T-shirt is revisited throughout *Slogan T-Shirts*, but emphasis is placed on the greater significance of T-shirts in contemporary popular culture. Commentators include musician Holly Johnson of the band Frankie Goes to Hollywood, whose merchandise became an accidental cultural phenomenon in the 1980s, and artist Jamie Reid, who crafted the cut-and-paste style of the 1970s punk scene in London, England. The use of T-shirts in academia is also featured. Talbot interviews Dr. Howard Bessar, professor of Cinema Studies and Founding Director of the Moving Image Archiving and Preservation master's degree program at NYU Tisch. As part of a library studies course he taught at the University of Michigan in 1995, Bessar's graduate students created a digital database archiving his personal T-shirt collection. Howard Bessar's T-Shirt Database<sup>4</sup> digitally preserves 533 of his total 2,300 politically motivated T-shirts. Further analysis of Bessar's database as it pertains to this thesis will be

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<sup>3</sup> Talbot, Stephanie. *Slogan T-Shirts: Cult and Culture*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 13-14.

<sup>4</sup> "Howard Bessar's T-Shirt Database", last modified 21 July, 2004, accessed July, 2020.  
<http://besser.tsoa.nyu.edu/T-Shirts/>

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included in the final section, “The COVID Context.” Talbot also includes biographies of designers and brands, such as Katherine Hamnett and Top Shop, that greatly influenced the prominence of the T-shirt

Joanne Turney’s chapter in *Fashion and War in Popular Culture* (2014), “Battle dressed: clothing the criminal, or the horror of the ‘hoodie’ in Britain” addresses the social context of the garment known as the “hoodie,” in a way that is unique for the fashion history field. The hoodie and the T-shirt share many similarities. Both are ordinary garments, mass manufactured, made of a tight cotton blend material, originally worn by working class men and adopted by the youth culture of the 1950s.<sup>5</sup> Turney emphasizes the socio-political power of the hoodie, but its association is in its perception as a uniform of those who commit crimes. Younger men, who frequently wear hoodies, are characterized by older audiences to be more likely to commit crimes.<sup>6</sup> Turney attributes the hoodie’s frequent association with crime to the nature of the hoodie’s form, as it includes a face concealing hood from which its name derives. Turney rightfully points out that the morality of the hoodie, and ordinary garments in general, is shaped by the society in which it exists. Morals are created by the political and social circumstances that are reflected in more than just the hoodie alone, but the perceived morals of the wearer. The folk lore of the concealed harbinger of suffering can be traced back to recollections of the grim reaper in antiquity, or the hooded figures of the Ku Klux Klan.

“All the great fictitious and mythical figures associated with evil or fear wear hoods, from the Grim Reaper, to mysterious hooded figures in Victorian novels to the

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<sup>5</sup> Joanne Turney, “Battle dressed: clothing the criminal, or the horror of the ‘hoodie’ in Britain.” *Fashion and War in Popular Culture*, ed. Denise N Rall, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 129.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

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Hooded Claw in the Penelope Pitstop cartoons: the covering of the or head hides the wearer's true identity, personality and intent.”<sup>7</sup>

The T-shirt does not share the face concealing element with the hoodie, but similarities in social and cultural context can be drawn.

Archival practices in relation with the T-shirt collecting first initiated by Howard Bessar's T-shirt database were further developed by Eric Gonzaba, professor of American Studies at California State University. Dr. Gonzaba created an online database to catalogue T-shirts relating to LGBT+ history; [wearinggayhistory.com](http://wearinggayhistory.com). In 2014, the database started while he was a graduate student at Simon Fraser University, BC, where he digitized the entire T-shirt collection of the Chris Gonzalez Library and Archives in Indiana. In 2015, the site began to include T-shirts from all over the United States that chronicled gay history.<sup>8</sup> As of February 2021, the database included entries from 13 libraries and archives, and over 3000 T-shirts from across the globe. The database is hosted by Omeka, an open-source web publishing platform for digital collections and creating “media-rich online exhibits.”<sup>9</sup> Through Omeka, [wearinggayhistory.com](http://wearinggayhistory.com) can plot the originating locations of each T-shirt and craft exhibitions from the database Dr. Gonzaba's staff has accumulated.

Collector contributions proved to be critical to the creation of *Politics Through T-Shirts*. The importance of the T-shirt itself to the collector's past has become more apparent in recent decades. They now serve as points of nostalgia for a collector's childhood, for example, or a connection to a time they never got to experience. Collectors provide a repository that fills the gaps where museum collections lack, as many T-shirts will not meet a collection's mandate. The

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<sup>7</sup> Turney, Joanne. “Battle dressed: clothing the criminal, or the horror of the ‘hoodie’ in Britain.”, 132.

<sup>8</sup> “About”, *Wearing Gay History*, accessed July, 2020. <http://wearinggayhistory.com/about>

<sup>9</sup> “Omeka” Homepage, accessed February 9, 2021, [Omeka.org](http://Omeka.org).

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majority of T-shirts created are produced on a mass scale, with no discernible provenance or brand name attached to the garment. T-shirts accumulated by collectors speak to their own personal taste levels, and not of that an institution. They act as curators and custodians of their own collections. The collectable status of the T-shirt has created a secondary market for the buying and reselling of T-shirts, with the most reputable collectors creating printed volumes of their acquisitions.

*Vintage T-Shirts* (2014), by Marc Guetta, Patrick Guetta, and Alison A. Neider; juxtaposes the mass collection of T-shirts the Guetta brothers have accumulated since the early 1980s with the history of the T-shirt. In 1987, they began a Los Angeles-based T-shirt printing company, Too Cute!, which licenced Walt Disney and Looney Toons characters for T-shirts.<sup>10</sup> The brothers also worked with influential figures from the entertainment industry, such as musician Michael Jackson and director Steven Spielberg. Decades of work in the apparel and T-shirt industry qualified the brothers to create a volume of their personal collection. The Guettas' collection features T-shirts from the 1970s and 80s, and spans several themes including food, slogans, brands, athletics, sports, music and movies, featuring some 650 examples in the book itself. The history of the T-shirt is written by Neider and translated from English into German and French, with each section featuring a different set of photographs to accompany the translated text. *Vintage T-Shirts* is the amalgamation of decades of work and benefited *Politics Through T-Shirts* by providing the more commonplace T-shirts that lacked provenance, which would not be found in a museum's collection.

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<sup>10</sup> Patrick Guetta, Marc Guetta, and Alison A. Neider, forward to *Vintage T-Shirts*. (Cologne: TASCHEN, 2010), 7.

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Similarly to *Vintage T-Shirts*, the book *Ripped: T-Shirts from the Underground* (2010), edited by Cesar Padilla, archives a personal collection of T-shirts. These T-shirts come from those involved in the American underground music scene of the 1960s and 70s, including designer Betsey Johnson, rock 'n roll photographer Bob Gruen, and musician Thurston Moore. Padilla notes that the collection is “by no means meant to represent an actual visual history of the music [he loves]. It is meant to represent only what [he has] found.”<sup>11</sup> Punk musician Lydia Lunch contributes the introduction, offering some T-shirt history and praising those involved in the underground music scene, but mostly admonishing Vivienne Westwood and “master manipulator and fashion victimizer” Malcolm McLaren for “conspir[ing] to commodify the original concept of punk.”<sup>12</sup> Speaking to tensions within the underground community between those that stayed true to their grassroots origins and those that found commercial success. *Ripped* contributes 200 rare indie music T-shirts, many handmade or made in small quantities, offering a grassroots counterpart to *Vintage T-Shirts*.

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<sup>11</sup> Padilla, Cesar, Forward to *Ripped: Shirts from the Underground*, ed. by Cesar Padilla, (New York: Universe Publishers, 2012), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Lunch, Lydia, *Ripped: Shirts from the Underground*, ed. Cesar Padilla, 7.



### Chapter 3: Historiography and Museology

It is difficult to give an exact definition of fashion curation. In its most obvious form, it is the acquisition of textiles and garments for a museum's collection that fits into the institution's mandate. A deeper analysis into the history of the practice shows that the simplest definition leaves ample room for the inadequate display of these items. As chronicled in the introduction of *Fashion Curation: Critical Practise in the Museum and Beyond*, the fashion exhibition has existed since the 1850s. The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) exhibited clothing as early as 1852, the year it opened to the public.<sup>13</sup> These shows were presented through a heavy colonialist lens. The emphasis was placed on antiquity and exoticism, especially on garments originating from Asia. With the opening of the East through the development of the railway connecting Europe and China, a fascination with Asian goods captivated Europe as a whole. Fashion curation is intended to be an informed and collaborative practise, and these displays lacked the critical and contextual aspects that is required that is required to fully interrogate the deep connections between fashion and politics of the empire.<sup>14</sup> This first attempt at fashion curation and display by Victorian curators gave little thought to the notion of fashion, style and design, and more of a perverse interest in the dress of a far-off land with no contextual details.

Fashion curation had improved in North American museums in the decades leading up to the Second World War. As pointed out in Alexandra Palmer's chapter "Impermanence: Curating Western Textiles and Fashion at the Royal Ontario Museum" in *Fashion Curation*, the Royal Ontario Museum's (ROM) founding curator, Charles Triek Curelly, placed great importance on

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<sup>13</sup> Hazel Clark and Annamari Vänskä, *Fashion Curation: Critical Practise in the Museum and Beyond*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), Google Play edition, 21.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

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Canadian craftsmanship in textiles.<sup>15</sup> The ROM's textile department was founded in 1940, helmed by curator Dorothy Burnham. Emphasis was still not placed on style or fashion, however there was a growing interest in the artform of textiles and design. The fashion element would be introduced in the years following World War II. WWII drew men out of the workforce for duty and gave women the opportunity to move into higher museum positions. As fashion and design are commonly seen as more female oriented fields, a more feminine touch to the academic and scholarly aspects of museum work allowed textile departments to expand on their mandates. Museums began to incorporate highly crafted garments from reputable designers into their collections. The Victoria and Albert Museum began incorporating contemporary fashion into their collections as early as 1950.<sup>16</sup> In 1971, the V&A displayed a series of works by British designers in contemporary fashion in the exhibition, *Fashion: An Anthology by Cecil Beaton*, which attracted over 90,000 visitors.<sup>17</sup> Following this, Diana Vreeland, former editor in chief of *Vogue* magazine, curated the first fashion exhibitions with a sole focus on a specific designer. Consulting with the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA), Vreeland curated a retrospective on the work of designer Cristobal Balenciaga, *The World of Balenciaga*, which opened in 1973. Clark and Vänskä cite this as a pivotal moment in fashion curation, as this gave a "fashion designer the accord formerly held for great artists."<sup>18</sup>

Diana Vreeland also signaled a change in curation -- the role of the "star curator"<sup>19</sup> -- that would not come into full fruition until the 1990s. The curator was no longer the custodian of a

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<sup>15</sup> Alexandra Palmer, "Impermanence: Curating Western Textiles at the Royal Ontario Museum." *Fashion Curation: Critical Practise in the Museum and Beyond*, 75.

<sup>16</sup> Clark and Vänskä, *Fashion Curation*, 25.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

museum's collection but the mediator between the public and the exhibit. Vreeland was the first of a series of influential figureheads who became the face of their exhibitions, not only in the fashion realm but in the museum field as a whole. However, this combination of star power of both the curator and designer alike made the fashion exhibitions of the late 1990s controversial. Such acclaim was usually reserved for more famed artists in a gallery settings, not for contemporary designers. Many critics did not consider fashion and art to be one and the same. Critics assailed such practices for placing the curator in the spotlight and “paradoxically [ended] up undermining the role of curating as an important tool for mediating critical thinking, social engagement and cultural analysis.”<sup>20</sup> However, this did not deter star curators from finding work. The most controversial of this group, Hans Ulrich Obrist, curated over 250 exhibitions internationally and expanded the curatorial gaze into books, conferences, blogs, and other digital means. For less assertive curators, the first fashion exhibition was approached cautiously. For example, Alexandra Palmer mounted a display of contemporary Canadian fashion in 1998, though “the exhibit approached fashion with a small ‘f.’”<sup>21</sup> The Canadian fashion identity was rather underdeveloped, so brands and designer names were secondary to the popular forms of Roots ski boots, designs based on Northwest Coast Indigenous traditions and an early ski jacket of Lululemon founder Kevin Young.<sup>22</sup>

Palmer's focus on Canadian brands in the late 1990s is reminiscent of a major critique that plagued fashion curation throughout the 2000s. The relationship between commerce and art at the institutional level is often subject to scrutiny, especially when the ethical lines around financial obligations are blurred. In 2001, the Guggenheim Museum in New York City launched

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<sup>20</sup> Clark and Vänskä, *Fashion Curation*, 23.

<sup>21</sup> Palmer, “Impermanence: Curating Western Textiles at the Royal Ontario Museum.” *Fashion Curating*, 79.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

a travelling retrospective on the work of fashion designer Giorgio Armani, but was rumoured to have been encouraged by a generous donation from the company.<sup>23</sup> Despite the biased context of the exhibition, “the curatorial pedigree of the show was stellar,”<sup>24</sup> and the display attracted wide acclaim. As pointed out at the time by *New York Times* art critic Herbert Muschamp, “There has never been a fixed order between cultural institutions and private enterprise.”<sup>25</sup> Despite no golden ratio to dictate the level of influence an active designer or brand should or should not have on an exhibition, remaining approachable to the public should always be top of mind.

It is in this regard that fashion curation fails frequently, as the high status of haute couture and designer brands is often only accessible to those with expendable means. Chanel collaborated with London-based Saatchi Gallery to mount *Little Black Jacket*, a play on the iconic Chanel “Little Black Dress” to highlight another staple of the Chanel catalogue. Organized by Chanel creative director Karl Lagerfeld and *Vogue* editor Carine Roitfeld, *Little Black Jacket* was intended to be a travelling exhibition to highlight the long-lived popularity of the Chanel jacket. In November 2008, The Chanel Mobile Art Pavilion was staged in Central Park, and was a highly exclusive and tailored event. The timing of the exhibition should be noted, as the United States was in the throes of an economic recession, and the mounting of such extravagance for the privileged few was received by critics as tone deaf.<sup>26</sup> *Little Black Jacket* was intended to appear in London and Tokyo in the ensuing months, but folded as a response to the backlash. It is in response to this lack of relatability from high end brands that the need for more grassroots and ordinary garments under a curatorial lens entered the fold of fashion exhibition.

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<sup>23</sup> Clark and Vänskä, *Fashion Curating*, 26.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

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The T-shirt has begun to make appearances between the gallery walls of the museum in recent years. Most relevant to this thesis is the Fashion and Textile Museum London's (FTML) 2018 exhibition *T-Shirt: Cult – Culture – Subversion*. The exhibit seeks to “explore the T-shirt in the 20th Century [...] charting the history, culture and subversion of the most affordable and popular item of clothing on the planet.” and “highlights the multi-faceted role of this humble garment.”<sup>27</sup> *T-Shirt: Cult – Culture – Subversion* could be considered the physical counterpart to *Politics Through T-Shirts*, as both address the socio-political context and history of the T-shirt, but developed by different actors. As seen in figures 1-4, provided by Hannah McDermid at designbridge.com, the exhibition features a private collection of career spanning Vivienne Westwood's and Dior's 2012 “We Should All be Feminists” T-shirt alongside more commonplace T-shirts not associated with a brand. The presentation of the garments is rather static, utilizing half mannequin stands, full body mannequin stands or simple hangers. This feels reminiscent of the T-shirt itself, which has a uniformity to its inherent structure.



Figure 1 Entrance to the *T-SHIRT: CULT - CULTURE - SUBVERSION*. Photo: Hannah McDermid for designbridge.com

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<sup>27</sup> “T-SHIRT: CULT – CULTURE- SUBVERSION” *Fashion and Textile Museum of London*. <https://www.ftmlondon.org/ftm-exhibitions/T-shirt-cult-culture-subversion/>

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*Figure 2 T-shirts on half mannequin displays at FTML. Photo: Hannah McDermid for designbridge.com*



*Figure 3 T-shirts on full body mannequin displays at FTML. Photo: Hannah McDermid for designbridge.com*



Figure 4 2012 Dior "We Should All Be Feminists" T-shirt on display at FTML. Photo: Hannah McDermid for designbridge.com

The introduction of ordinary, mass manufactured objects into exhibitions has been introduced in the late 2000s. In 2008, the Victoria and Albert Museum displayed a series of Che Guevara ephemera. Guevara, the Argentinian revolutionary who aided the Castro brothers in establishing a communist administration in Cuba in 1959, became a global icon for his enduring rebellious spirit. Titled *Che Guevara: Revolutionary and Icon*, the exhibit analyzed the evolution of the *Guerillo Heroico* image, captured in 1960 by photographer Alberto Karda, into a pop culture anomaly. The stylized image was transformed into a marketing tool for mass-produced products.<sup>28</sup> Museum curators “trawled the internet, scoured flea markets and even grubbed in

<sup>28</sup> “Past Exhibits and Displays 2006 - Che Guevara: Revolutionary and Icon” Victoria and Albert Museum. vam.ac.uk. Accessed January, 2021. <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/p/past-exhibitions-and-displays-2006/>

rubbish bins to document Che's omnipresence and the slippery flexibility of his appeal.”<sup>29</sup> The exhibit was lined with Che appearances on cigarette packaging from Spain, wine from France, root beer from Canada and ice cream from Australia. The imagery even appeared on album covers, such as Madonna's 2003 album *American Life*. The exhibit utilized the common objects to exemplify the degradation of Che's image into one he himself would never have supported in his lifetime.

The origins of the fashion exhibit do not give justice to the complex nature of curation in the twenty-first century. It is more than just the acquisition of garments for a museum's collection, but a collaborative effort to relate the social and cultural importance of these pieces to the public. As stated concisely in *Fashion Curation*, “Fashion curation plays a critical role in managing and mediating aesthetic experience, framing cultural conditions in institutions and the fashion industry and in constructing knowledge.”<sup>30</sup> Although the ethical implications and importance of the public facing aspect can be lost by those mediating the exhibitions, especially those not trained in museum studies, it is still a growing form of curation with mass amounts of potential.

### **Digital Fashion Exhibitions**

Institutions can now utilize the power of the Internet to advertise upcoming exhibitions and provide catalogues of previous displays. The online digital exhibition has seen a boom within the last decade, and can exist as a stand-alone virtual experience, or as an extension of an ongoing retrospective. The online exhibition can take many forms, but those analyzed relate to

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Conrad, “The name on everyone's lips” *The Guardian*. Retrieved theguardian.com, published 11 June, 2006, par. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Clark and Vänskä, *Fashion Curating*, 29.



*Protest Through T-Shirts* in that they are solely focused on fashion in the digital landscape. All display the intersection of fashion curation and digital exhibition, but apply different approaches.

The Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum is one of over 2,000 museums, archives, world heritage sites and local communities that have partnered with Google Arts & Culture to “share, curate and contextualize their treasures in a way that was unimaginable 10 years ago.”<sup>31</sup> Since becoming available in February 2011, The V&A has collaborated extensively with Google beyond their Arts & Culture page on other projects to amplify the virtual experience of the fashion exhibit. In 2017, a 1990 Vivienne Westwood corset, 1937 Elsa Schiaparelli evening coat and 18<sup>th</sup> century robe worn by a Qing Dynasty emperor were virtually replicated using ultra-high resolution cameras to provide an up close 365 degree experience.<sup>32</sup> Kati Price, Head of Digital Media at the V&A, stated that the museum is committed to exploring the relationship between new technology and fashion “while discovering the tantalising stories behind them in ways never experienced before.”<sup>33</sup> The garments in augmented reality can be viewed through the Google Arts & Culture app for Apple iOS and Android smartphones, offering even further immersion and accessibility to viewers at home or on the go.<sup>34</sup> The V&A serves as an example of the outstanding possibilities Google Arts & Culture can provide as an extension to traditional museum work, but should not be seen as the standard for all museums and institutions to reach.

The V&A has provided detailed digital entries of over 5,000 cultural objects, a significant portion being drawn from the fashion and textiles collection. Items have been curated into eleven

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<sup>31</sup> Amit Sood, “Google Arts & Culture Turns 10” *Google Arts & Culture*, Feb 1, 2021, blog.google, par. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Danielle Wightman-Stone, “Victoria and Albert Museum Collaborates with Google.” *Fashion United*, June 8, 2017, fashionunited.uk, par. 7.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 8.

<sup>34</sup> “Art Projector: Corset, Vivienne Westwood, 1990 (Google Arts & Culture)”, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://artsandculture.google.com/art-projector/uwEf64Kbiup3CA?hl=en>.

“stories,”<sup>35</sup> a more digital-age friendly term for an exhibit.<sup>36</sup> Examining two of the eleven stories, *Balenciaga: Master Craftsman*, which highlighted the work of designer Cristobal Balenciaga, and *Schiaparelli and Surrealism*, focused on the collaboration between designer Elsa Schiaparelli and surrealist artists, different methods have been utilized to create a multi-faceted experience. The *LIFE* photo archives were accessed minimally to provide candid photographs of the designers and models wearing the featured garments, but the majority of materials are sourced directly from the V&A digital entries. A behind the scenes video was created specifically for the *Balenciaga* exhibit showing the ghost labour of museum staff recreating a historic Balenciaga dress, as well an animation component which visualizes the deconstructed 2-dimensional pieces that form the 3-dimension garment.<sup>37</sup> The video itself is hosted on YouTube, an open-source video platform owned by Google, and implemented into the story. In both the *Balenciaga* and *Schiaparelli* exhibits, images of garments are digitally amplified to highlight specific details. This is possible due the high resolution photographs the V&A can create with ample resources and access to state-of-the-art cameras, but this level of access is not always a possibility for the other 2,000 institutions with Arts & Culture partnerships.

Google Arts & Culture provides a level playing field for museums and heritage organizations with its intuitive tools and clean interface that are easily manageable for museum workers. The V&A’s of the world do not receive different layouts or display options than local

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<sup>35</sup> “The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, United Kingdom – Google Arts & Culture.” Google Arts & Culture, accessed February 9, 2021. <https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/victoria-and-albert-museum>

<sup>36</sup> Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat implemented “Story” functions that share user-uploaded content in a slideshow format for a full 24 hours before becoming inaccessible (except in some cases where the user can access a personal archive.) The term “Story” is now ubiquitous with a short term digital portfolio. The Google variant differs in that it is accessible for longer periods of time and not automatically deleted after a set number of hours.

<sup>37</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, “Learning from ‘the Master’ Balenciaga Revealed”, Published 24 May, 2017. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qYEUlq7wLI&ab\\_channel=VictoriaandAlbertMuseum](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qYEUlq7wLI&ab_channel=VictoriaandAlbertMuseum)

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museums, but the disparity lies in the tools needed to transform tangible objects into their digital forms. This requires high resolution cameras, as mentioned, adequate lighting and studio space, as well as the technological know-how to maintain and upload the entries into Google's database. Many museums do not have disposable resources, so the addition of the expectations to maintain a digital page like that of the V&A's on Google Arts & Culture adds undue cost. Attempting to use the magnification tool similarly to the V&A would lack the intended effect if the image did not have the adequate resolution. This reinforces the original argument of this thesis, which is that the digital exhibit will never replace the physical one. In many cases it would force a smaller institution to reallocate funds from other museum needs to facilitate the expected level of production quality.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA) houses the Costume Institute, which as mentioned in the Museology and Historiography section was instrumental in the development of contemporary fashion exhibitions through the work of Diana Vreeland. For their 2016 Met Gala exhibition highlighting the intersectionality of humans and machine in fashion, *Manus x Machina: Fashion in the Age of Technology*, the MMA opted for a simplified and streamlined digital component to accompany the physical display.<sup>38</sup> This approach could be compared to a paper pamphlet that viewers would receive at a physical gallery, instead of a stand-alone exhibition. It is meant as a preview of the display, but not to provide the equivalent amount of information received from the exhibit itself. The MMA organized the online component by theme, providing a single photo and maximum three paragraphs to accompany each section. The entirety of the exhibit is presented on one webpage. Multiple garments were photographed

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<sup>38</sup> "Exhibition Galleries - Manus x Machina: Fashion in the Age of Technology," metmuseum.org (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), accessed February 09, 2021, <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2016/manus-x-machina/exhibition-galleries>.

together and featured designers listed in the text, but not individually identified.<sup>39</sup> For example, the section labelled *Plissee II (Pleating)* brings garments designed with mathematical equations and digital grids replicated into the design together. Thierry Mugler, Junya Watanabe and Issey Miyake are listed as designers featured in this section of the exhibition, but the accompanying photograph does not identify which garment bears each designer's name. Numerous ensembles are presented in the exhibition, far more than the webpage would suggest, but this was intentional. It is bite-sized and easy for a viewer to digest, acting more as a highlight reel. It requires the viewer only a few minutes to peruse the webpage. The viewer leaves with an understanding of the exhibition and the themes highlighted without having attended the show itself, but does not see the intimate details of what makes the physical display so thought evoking. The MMA presented a very practical approach to the online digital exhibition, intended as an extension of the physical and does not solely exist in the digital.

The Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris (MYSL), dedicated to preserving the work and legacy of its namesake designer, opened in October 2017 in the *hôtel particulier* at 5 avenue Marceau, Paris. It was the location Yves Saint Laurent used as the offices for his design house for over almost thirty years, from 1974 to his retirement in 2002. The MYSL published *The Chronicles*, a narrative focused online exhibit divided into five modules exploring various phases of Yves Saint Laurent's life. Each chronical was supported by numerous archival documents, enabling the viewer to “discover aspects of his life and work that have sometimes been little

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<sup>39</sup> The exception to this being the main case study of the exhibit, the *Chanel Wedding Ensemble*, featuring one Chanel wedding gown designed by Karl Lagerfeld with an awe inspiring train covered in gold, glass and crystal beads. The original hand drawn design by Lagerfeld was digitally manipulated to create a pixilated baroque inspired pattern.

known.”<sup>40</sup> Each module was given an estimated time to complete, totalling sixty-one minutes total, with the promise of new modules to be added in the near future.

Of all the case studies presented in this thesis, the design and layout of *The Chronicles* is the most reminiscent of *Politics Through T-Shirts*. If I, the author, did not make *Politics Through T-Shirts* myself, I would think it was inspired by *The Chronicles*. The module titled, *The Dior Years*, is estimated to take ten minutes to complete and follows Laurent who, at the age of 21, became the successor of Christian Dior’s fashion house. The introductory text was placed over a black and white image of Laurent on a balcony surrounded by press. Each section of *Politics Through T-Shirts* begins in the same fashion, with text overlaid on an introductory image. (See Appendix A3, A8, A20, and A29) Each module is divided into short chapters, which created concise and easily digestible paragraphs similar to the MMA case study. Interactive elements, such as the letters between Laurent and *Vogue* editor-in-chief Michel de Brunhoff, appear overlaid on top of the exhibit once the viewer clicks on the link, demanding their undivided attention to explore the finite details of the correspondence. Similar to the Google Arts & Culture exhibits, photographs can be digitally enhanced to point out details. In the chapter titled, *The Death of Christian Dior*, Laurent is singled out in a crowd by a magnifying feature.<sup>41</sup> *The Chronicles* represent an entirely virtual example of the online exhibition. It has no physical counterpart, makes extensive use of primary materials beyond the garments Laurent created to amplify narrative, context and prioritized viewer interaction with the web page. *The Chronicles* exemplify a potential future for online exhibitions, ones that live solely on the Internet and can be expanded and edited as time continues. Such possibilities provide a very fluid nature to

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<sup>40</sup> “Chronicles.” Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris, accessed February 10, 2021. <https://museeyslparis.com/en/stories>

<sup>41</sup> “Chronicles – The Death of Christian Dior” Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris, accessed February 10, 2021. <https://museeyslparis.com/en/stories/les-annees-dior-1-1#the-death-of-christian-dior>

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exhibitions not possible for the physical, as once a display is mounted its contents are set in stone. Changes which would normally require the assistance of museum maintenance with careful supervision, could be replaced with a few clicks of a mouse and keyboard.

#### Chapter 4: The COVID Context and Open-Source Curating

As stated in the introduction, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic an in-person internship at the Museum of Vancouver (MOV) became difficult to negotiate. With provinces entering lockdown and mass restrictions being implemented across the country, the uncertainty of what the remainder of 2020 held not only for myself, but the MOV as well, made the possibility of the internship unfeasible. Pre-coronavirus, the experience of graduate school was incredibly enriching, but the onset of the pandemic created a very stressful set of circumstances. Pushing forward, I felt that it was of great importance to realign my thesis project the reflected both the changing nature of life as we knew it, and the polarizing political climate that overtook the summer of 2020. The Black Lives Matter movement, in a response to the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, witnessed a mass resurgence in July and August and sparked protests worldwide. The new project, a digital exhibition on the history of the T-shirt and its transformation into a tool of dissent for the masses, allowed for the opportunity to create something unique, for both fashion curation and digital public history. I gave the exhibition the name *Politics Through T-Shirts: A History of Protest*, as it chronicles the growing importance of the T-shirt in the United States not only as a function of style, but a means of communication in society. It speaks to a need to bridge the gap between fashion and socio-political movements, as the two are often seen are polar opposites.

Fashion is a choice, either conscious or subconscious. An individual's choice of dress is determined by either their own autonomy or that of society's at large. If President John F. Kennedy had addressed the nation during the Cuban Missile Crises in October of 1962 wearing his pajamas, it would not have projected the leader of a strong nation but a scared, frazzled man. As argued out by Joanne Turney, the garment a person puts on their back projects to the world

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how they want to be perceived, a perception based on societal standards of that time.<sup>42</sup> These minute details are often overlooked, as their ordinary nature forces them to fade into the background. It is when we amplify their importance, do we begin to understand the individual and subconscious choices that led to that garment being chosen for a certain day, and for a certain moment. As it relates to *Politics Through T-Shirts*, the choice to print a message onto a T-shirt, or buy a T-shirt with a specific design or image silkscreened on, speaks to what the wearer wants the world to know about them as an individual. This could relate to social causes, sporting events, current events, popular movies and music, all of which speak to a wearer's need to silently communicate their association with that image. To demonstrate this concept to a public audience, the T-shirt was juxtaposed against more traditional acts protest in America throughout the latter half of the twentieth century throughout. Protest T-shirts do not exist in a vacuum, they are created for protest and as an act of protest themselves. The biggest challenge in creating a solely digital exhibition on in the year 2020 and 2021 was the lack of access to any physical resources.

*Politics Through T-Shirts* was divided into five sections, *A Brief History of the T-Shirt*, *The 1960s*, *The 1970s*, *The 1980s*, and *The 1990s*. T-shirts can be organized in a few different ways. It would have been feasible to organize based on the various movements, such as the Gay Liberation Movement or the Anti-Vietnam War Movement, but given the need to establish the trajectory of the T-shirt alongside these movements, a clear segmentation of the decades provided the easiest route to guide the user through. Due to my lack of web developing skills, the best platform to host the website and exhibition would be one designed for beginners.

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<sup>42</sup> Turney, "Battle dressed: clothing the criminal, or the horror of the 'hoodie' in Britain." *Fashion and War in Popular Culture*, 129.



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Squarespace.com has multiple layout options and an intuitive grid website builder.<sup>43</sup> Also, their digital marketing campaigns with multiple online affiliates provided discount codes to make their services more affordable. Once the website and URL was purchased and the overall outline created, it was time for the physical act of assembling an online exhibition.

Armed with only the tools of what could be accessed through university resources and the Internet, I titled the resulting approach Open Source Curation. It is the curation of an exhibit with no reliance on a single institution's collection, no mandate to follow, just the implementation of best ethical museum practices with no museum directly involved. No T-shirt displayed in *Politics Through T-Shirts* was physically accessible during its creation. All items were taken from print sources, digitized museum collections and reliable web sources. Abiding by fair use proved to be fundamental to the development of *Politics Through T-Shirts*. By its legal definition, fair use is “any copying of copyrighted material done for a limited and “transformative” purpose, such as to comment upon, criticize, or parody a copyrighted work. Such uses can be done without permission from the copyright owner.”<sup>44</sup> Fair use in the context of *Politics Through T-Shirts* meant abiding by the terms and conditions of artists, photographers, museums and galleries as stated on their websites. The T-shirt itself is not claimable by copyright, but the image created to represent the garment is. For example, Vivienne Westwood T-shirts from the 1970s are frequently included in museum arts and design collections due to Westwood's high profile brand name. Both the MMA and V&A have extensive collections of her work. The V&A's website terms and conditions stated, “Content on the V&A website is

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<sup>43</sup> “Templates” squarespace.com, accessed Feb 19, 2021, <https://www.squarespace.com/templates>.

<sup>44</sup> “What is fair use?” *Stanford University Libraries*. Fairuse.stanford.edu. Accessed February 12, 2021. <https://fairuse.stanford.edu/overview/fair-use/what-is-fair-use/#:~:text=In%20its%20most%20general%20sense,permission%20from%20the%20copyright%20owner>.

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published for your enjoyment. You may freely access and store the majority of this Content for personal or private use. [...] The V&A considers non-commercial use to be any use that is not intended for or directed towards commercial advantage of monetary compensation.”<sup>45</sup> As *Politics Through T-Shirts* is intended for personal study, and not for monetary gain, it falls within the fair use of that image. By comparison, a Westwood T-shirt from the MMA collection stated, “Due to rights restrictions, this image cannot be enlarged, viewed at full screen, or downloaded.”<sup>46</sup> While shirts from the MMA are referenced in *Politics Through T-Shirts*, only ones from the V&A were included. Fair use enabled YouTube videos, *LIFE* magazine and *LIFE* photo archives, and *New York Times* archives to be consulted for supporting materials throughout.

The process of making an entirely online digital exhibition from home is a mixture of both inspiration and frustration, and an opportunity to consider the bigger implications online exhibitions can have on an institution. *Politics Through T-Shirts* is an open-access website and available to everyone with an Internet connection. Although, it is worth noting that the over emphasis of accessibility through the Internet could be a deterrence in itself, as many marginalized communities lack reliable digital resources. That aside, removing the premium ticket prices from exhibitions is a great benefit to public history, as it is the public the museum seeks to serve that needs to see it. However, free access to an exhibit may be as much of a hinderance to an institution as it is a benefit. Ticket sales are often an institutions main source of revenue to maintain collections, mount new displays, and pay staff salaries. Limiting a steady revenue source could be detrimental to an institution.

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<sup>45</sup> “V&A Websites Terms and Conditions.” Victoria and Albert, vam.ac.uk, accessed January 2021.

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/info/va-websites-terms-conditions>

<sup>46</sup> “T-shirt: Vivienne Westwood.” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, metmuseum.org, accessed November, 2020.

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/789207>

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Similarly, pulling sources from a wide array of web and print materials for a web page allows garments and media to be presented together not possible in a physical space. The more complex materials in an exhibition, the more diverse staging methods are required. Again, there is a consequence to this, as a lack of physical access can limit what you can use. A collection of effects owned by theatrical activist Abbie Hoffman, who was highlighted in the 1960s' section of *Politics Through T-Shirts*, are catalogued at the University of Connecticut's Library and Archives. The collection, the Hoffman Family Papers, lists articles of clothing among its contents, including T-shirts.<sup>47</sup> While the standard archival description is provided, such as a white "Yippie Miami Beach," a red "Just Say No" T-shirt, and a green "My Country Invaded Nicaragua" T-shirt, in a visual display text based records cannot be used.

Within the same vein, the sociology paper by Dorie S. Goldman, "*Down for La Raza*": *Barrio Art T-Shirts, Chicano Pride, and Cultural Resistance* (1997), analyzes the use of the T-shirts amongst Latino communities in Los Angeles and Austin, Texas in the 1990s. As a response to systemic issues, the Latino community had created a unique art style, a collage of folk heroes printed onto T-shirts, as a means of identification and tokens of pride in their heritage.<sup>48</sup> If *Politics Through T-Shirts* were a formal history paper, the work about these garments could be included, but the grainy black and white images embedded in the pdf document could not be extracted for use. Admittedly, this is a disappointing loss for *Politics Through T-Shirts*, as it risks the erasure of this community's contributions to the use of the T-shirt. The state of technology in the 1990s also limited the use of Howard Besser's T-Shirt

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<sup>47</sup> "Clothing: Hoffman Family Papers" University of Connecticut Library and Archives, accessed November, 2020. <https://archives.lib.uconn.edu/islandora/object/20002%3A860122598#ref345>

<sup>48</sup> Dorie S. Goldman, "Down for La Raza: Barrio Art T-Shirts, Chicano Pride, and Cultural Resistance" *Journal of Folklore Research* 34, no. 2 (1997): 125.

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Database beyond a point of reference. The scanned images were not of a high enough quality to maintain the standard needed for a webpage in 2021. As a result, both of these otherwise useful resources had to be omitted. Access and technology again became an issue when scans of printed sources were needed. There was only access to one flatbed scanner, which for a one-person team was not the heart of the challenge, but in attempting to create presentation worthy scans for the exhibition. To avoid obvious shadows casted by the spine of the book, the sacrilegious act of cutting out the needed pages of *Vintage T-Shirts* and *Ripped: T-Shirts from the Underground* occurred. Thankfully, these were personally owned books and still in print for reorder.

Due to the large swath of history covered in *Politics Through T-Shirts*, certain social protest movements of the later twentieth century were omitted. Second Wave Feminism of the 1970s, and the development of feminism throughout the 1980s and 90s, although important to the cultural and political history of America, did not find a natural fit in the exhibition's narrative. Given another opportunity to dive back into this topic, feminism alone could dominate an exhibit on their use of the T-shirt as protest media, physical or digital. As previously stated, this bottom up approach connecting fashion and social history is relatively new, and there is an incredible amount of material to disseminate without the limitations of a global pandemic. *Politics Through T-Shirts* should be seen as a starting point to the history of the protest T-Shirt, and not as it's definitive story. Will anyone ever have to curate an entirely digital exhibition while waiting out a global pandemic? Hopefully not, both because with any luck COVID-19 will be eradicated in the near future, and also because the majority of online exhibitions are created by institutions with collections to lean on for their displays, in both physical and digital form. Open-source curation may only exist as a product of its time, and used by the person that created it.

## Chapter 5: Essays from *Politics Through T-Shirts: A History of Protest*

### Intro/ Curatorial Statement

For as long as structured institutions of authority have existed, there has been resistance. The relationship between authority and dissent is fueled by the tension that exists between those in power and those that power is exacted upon. Protest is a powerful tool for the masses and has consistently proven to be key in a free and true democratic society. The United States of America utilized protest to establish independence in 1776, and continued the tradition throughout the twentieth century. Protest is as American as apple pie.

The tireless work of protestors from across the nation during the latter half of the twentieth century brought massive change to the United States, on both the social and legislative levels. These movements have utilized many forms of art and media to achieve their ultimate goals, one of which was the use of T-shirts as a billboard and a call to action. *Politics Through T-Shirts: A History of Protest* examines a timeline of protest and political expression in the United States through a seemingly simple garment: the T-shirt.

For such a humble garment, the T-shirt has proven to be incredibly complex. In the context of the protest T-shirt, it's development can be traced through two streams. The grassroots movement stream, which utilized the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) nature of the original protest T-shirt, and the consumerist stream, which produced politically motivated T-shirts for mass consumption. The streams intersect multiple times throughout the chronology of the protest T-shirt. Within them, multiple themes can be drawn. These themes include but are not limited to; gender, race, sexual orientation, music, fashion, celebrity, and the cross cultural relationship between the United States and Great Britain. Each of these themes is revisited many times throughout, creating a complicated web of interaction and influence bound together by cotton

and silk screening. *Politics Through T-Shirts* is not meant to determine the most effective protest movements, but highlight those that sought this particular medium to strengthen their cause. It is a small piece of a much bigger picture.

The T-shirts, graphics and multi-media materials gathered have been collected from print sources, digitized collections of museums and archives across the United States, and the digitized archives of news publications. It has been an exercise in digital curation when physical curation is not possible due to the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic. Perhaps in the future a physical display of these materials will be possible.

As the viewer will see, the journey of the protest T-shirt begins before ink is put to canvas. It is a story that originates in the Industrial Revolution, building and growing throughout the decades, before its first appearance in the late 1960s. It is worth noting, that the most important movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Civil Rights Movement, is not directly relevant to the development of T-shirts, but to the development of social movements that followed. So while the viewer will not see any T-shirt directly related to the Civil Rights Movement, it's influence is felt throughout.

Inevitably, the consumerist stream that made the T-shirt a staple in wardrobes across the United States, and the world, overtook its grassroots counterpart. By the late 1990s, market saturation and capitalist opportunities introduced a level of irony that left the future of the protest T-shirt in a state of flux. But despite these uncertainties, the T-shirt still exists today as a tool of communication and an artform of protest.

### **A Brief History of the T-Shirt**

The origins of the T-shirt can be traced back to the Industrial Revolution and the invention of the industrial knitting machine in the late 1800s. Textile mills in the US began producing a unique tight knit cotton that was developed into hosiery and undergarments. P. H.

Hanes Knitting Co., predecessor to the Hanes clothing company, created an undergarment known as the “Union Suit”<sup>49</sup> for labour intensive work. The Union Suit resembled a long-john style underwear with short sleeves, intended to be worn in hot or cold weather. Over time, the Union Suit would evolve into a two piece variation addressing consumer frustrations with the limited mobility the Union Suit allowed. Many men had taken to cutting the suit in half and tucking the remaining top portion into their work pants. The Union Suit was then sold in two pieces, a top and bottom, creating the first T-shirt prototype. Russell Manufacturing Co., another producer of undergarments, turned their marketing efforts toward the burgeoning athletics market in the 1920s, marketing the top solely as a bachelor shirt.<sup>50</sup> For the first half-century of its existence, the T-shirt existed to “get dirty, be laundered frequently, and was rarely seen except in special circumstances.”<sup>51</sup>

In 1913 the T-shirt was incorporated into the US Navy’s official uniform, categorized as lightweight short sleeve cotton vests.<sup>52</sup> They would remain an unseen undergarment until the Second World War, when off-duty servicemen were seen by the public in news publications enjoying leisure time in their undershirts.



Figure 5 Sailors aboard the USS California, 1923. Alison A. Nieder, *Vintage T-Shirts*, Pg. 10

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<sup>49</sup> Guetta, Guetta, and Nieder, *Vintage T Shirts*, 9.

<sup>50</sup> Jubin Bekrab, “T-Shirt: The Rebel With a Cause,” *bbc.com*, Feb 2, 2018, par. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Guetta, Guetta, and Nieder. *Vintage T-Shirts*, 9.

<sup>52</sup> Bekrab, “T-Shirt: The Rebel With a Cause,” par. 6.



Figure 6 Corporal Alexander Le Gerda, member of the 853rd Ordnance Company, on the cover of *Life* magazine July 13, 1942. The magazine states that "shirt he is wearing is part of his athletic equipment." Courtesy of Google x Life Magazine

The term 'T-shirt' first appeared in the 1920 novel, *This Side of Paradise*, by American author F. Scott Fitzgerald, and added to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary the same year.<sup>53</sup> In the inter-war period, the T-shirt had already made its fashion debut among women's styles. Pressed by fabric shortages in France following the First World War, Coco Chanel came across the simple garment and incorporated it into her subsequent collections. The look was soon adopted by French women, but failed to make an impact with women in the US. Civilian men, however, began to incorporate the piece into their wardrobes. In its infancy, 1940s California surfer culture began knitting images into heavier T-shirts and experimented with branding.<sup>54</sup> Motorcycle gangs that roamed the California coast such as the Hell's Angels wore them under their insignia-embled vests.<sup>55</sup> It was the singular style of these self-proclaimed bands of degenerates that

<sup>53</sup> Bekrab, "T-Shirt: The Rebel With a Cause," par. 6.

<sup>54</sup> Guetta, Guetta, and Nieder, *Vintage T-Shirts*, 10.

<sup>55</sup> Hunter S. Thompson, *Hell's Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1965), 24.



captured the imagination of Hollywood and solidified the T-shirt as an icon of rebellion, youth culture and dissent.



Figure 7 Early heavy knit T-shirt with imagery. California, ca. 1940.

Two of the most prolific actors of the 1950s, Marlon Brando and James Dean, rose to fame clad in a tight white T-shirt. Brando in *The Wild One* (1953), emulating the aforementioned motorcycle gang culture, and in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) as the dreamy but despotically drunk Stanley Kowalski. Dean, in one of his four films before his untimely death, *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), created a sensation that woke the masses of America up to the rebellious nature of the T-shirt. Simultaneously, the T-shirt's association with the working man and servicemen epitomized the strengthening of American values that defined the 1950s. The T-shirt promoted how to be rebelliously cool while still uniquely American.

Entering into the “long”<sup>56</sup> 1960s, a time of great social upheaval and overlapping revolutionary movements, the T-shirt was mobilized to aid in the fight for rights across the country. Paired with the silk screening process, which had been in use since World War I to

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<sup>56</sup> Ralph Young, *Dissent: The History of An American Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 453.

create propaganda posters, the T-shirt became a vital instrument in the fight for equality. The concept of the printed T-shirt for public consumption had existed since 1948, when it was used to promote the presidential campaign of Thomas E. Dewey. In the 1950s, T-shirts were used in small amounts to promote television shows such as *Howdy Doody* and merchandise for rock icon Elvis Presley.<sup>57</sup>

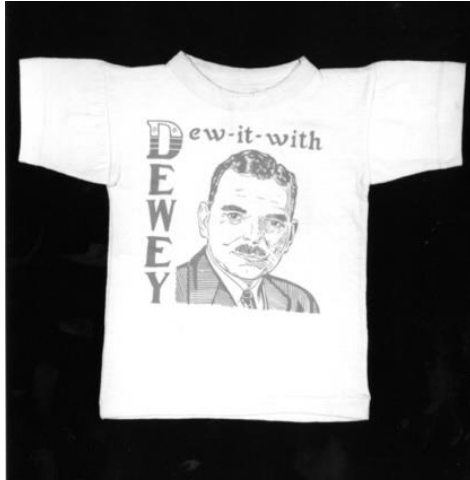


Figure 8 Thomas E. Dewey presidential campaign T-shirt with the slogan "Dew-it-with-Dewey", 1948. From the collections of the National Museum of American History. ID No. PL.227739.1948.C07



Figure 9 T-shirt made in promotion for the television show *Howdy Doody*, 1950s.

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<sup>57</sup> Guetta, Guetta, and Nieder. *Vintage T-Shirts*, 359.

Changes in the printing process and the invention of a more durable ink, plastisol, allowed for the mass creation of T-shirts emblazoned with iconography, slogans and imagery.<sup>58</sup> The T-shirt allowed the wearer to create a direct but non-verbal link between themselves and the causes they cared about, a silent protest that could be acknowledged by those passing on the street. The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed massive change in the United States on every level; political, social, cultural, and economic. The sentiments of those that lived through these movements are memorialized in many ways, but few as personal as the T-shirt.

### **The 1960s: Grassroots Beginnings**

Throughout the 1960s T-shirts continued to grow in popularity. Athletic wear companies that had included T-shirts in their catalogue since the 1920s quickly adopted printing technology to promote sports teams and create school varsity apparel. For children, T-shirts had proven to be ideal for rowdy excursions outside prone to making clothes dirty or damaged. The low cost of the T-shirt made it easily replaceable if it was ripped or stained. Commercially, the British Invasion of the early 1960s created an increase of band T-shirts made for fans to show off their favourite member of The Beatles and partake in Beatlemania. Later in the decade, this would set the stage for a cottage industry of music industry T-shirts. Quickly realizing the appeal to consumers of designing their own shirts, art supply stores and sporting goods stores began selling Do-It-Yourself (DIY) print screening kits.<sup>59</sup>

The 1960s was an overlapping minefield of social revolutionary movements, created by the momentum of the Civil Rights Movement that had begun in the mid-1950s. Freedom Summer in 1964 attracted students nationwide to southern states to aid in voter registration.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Guetta, Guetta, and Nieder. *Vintage T-Shirts*, 10.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Young, *Dissent: The History of an American Idea*, 444.

Upon returning to their respective campuses in the fall, students were proud to show off their battle scars and tell stories from their intrepid missions. At the University of California at Berkeley, graduate student Jack Weinberg was arrested while manning a booth for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) for violating the university's policy against political activism.<sup>61</sup> Enraged and emboldened from their experiences over the summer, students mobilized. The Free Speech Movement began in the fall of 1964 and inspired campuses nationwide. Students now felt it was their civic duty to critique the authoritative powers that not only controlled campuses, but the nation as a whole.

The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), formed in 1960, sought to enable students to speak freely about social and political issues. The SDS organized teach-ins, seminars and workshops that would run at night. Visiting scholars and intellectuals debated the ethical implications of American involvement in the war in Vietnam throughout 1964 and 1965. As President Johnson initiated on the ground American involvement in 1965 through Operation Rolling Thunder, the division between pro and anti-Vietnam groups became more hostile.<sup>62</sup>

The effects of the Vietnam War rippled throughout the country. The counterculture of the 1960s was a mass component the anti-war movement, which included members of the Student Movement and Civil Rights Movement. The hub of the counter-culture, the Haight Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco, had witnessed a mass exodus of young people throughout the mid 1960s seeking solace from the tension that engulfed the rest of the country. Between 1965 and 1967, an estimated 10,000 people moved into the twenty five block area.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Danny Goldberg, *In Search of the Lost Chord: 1967 and the Hippie Movement* (Brooklyn, New York: Akashic Books, 2017), 81.

<sup>62</sup> Young, *Dissent: The History of An American Idea*, 455.

<sup>63</sup> Goldberg, *In Search of the Lost Chord: 1967 and the Hippie Idea*, 25.



*Figure 10 Hippie Couple on the streets of Haight-Ashbury, late 1960s. The man dons a shirt with a peace sign painted on the back. Jim Marshall for Time magazine*

The draft had threatened the livelihoods of many not willing to put their lives on the line for a war they did not believe in. The hippies of Haight-Ashbury believed they could solve the world's problems through free love, peace and a considerable amount of psychedelic drugs. Hippie culture emphasized a rejection of the status quo that had restricted their parent's generation,<sup>64</sup> and the unconventional nature of the T-shirt was a natural fit for this environment. T-shirts were expected to be worn by men under a collared shirt, by children or for athletics. The act of wearing one casually in public, especially by a woman, was confrontational to these standards.



*Figure 11 Peggy Caserta, owner of hippie boutique Mnasidika in Haight Ashbury, wearing a surfer-style T-shirt. Friend and leather smith Bobby Boles sits next to her wearing a sport-style T-shirt over a dark turtleneck. Photo: Herb Greene. Courtesy of Peggy Caserta for Vulture Magazine*

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<sup>64</sup> Goldberg, *In Search of the Lost Chord: 1967 and the Hippie Movement*, 67.

Similarly to the anti-war movement itself, the T-shirt had become considerably more revolutionary in just a few years. It was cheap and disposable, much like the draft cards that were burned at anti-war rallies across the country. T-shirts soon underwent a countercultural makeover, utilizing the Indian practise of *bandhani* to create psychedelic tie-dye T-shirts.<sup>65</sup> DIY silk-screening and the new technology of heat transfer inks and papers created shirts that would be sold by hippie vendors on the streets of Haight-Ashbury and at music festivals. The baby boomer generation could now express political affiliations and musical preference through their T-shirts.<sup>66</sup>

The feeling of unconditional love and unity had faded dramatically by August 1968 when Democratic National Convention (DNC) convened in Chicago. In the months leading up to the event, the US witnessed the assassinations of Martin Luther King jr. and Senator Robert F. Kennedy. The true state of the Vietnam War, including the mass amounts of Vietnamese civilian casualties had finally come to light, and a general distrust of the White House and President Johnson had created a tense environment.<sup>67</sup> Several political groups had planned to be present in Chicago for the convention.

One of these groups was the Youth International Party, also known as “Yippies”.<sup>68</sup> Guerilla theatre activists Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin wanted to create a phony social group to serve as a media focal point and parody of the counterculture. The goal was to create middle-America’s nightmare, the worst version of the hippie culture. Hoffman and Rubin had become counterculture celebrities when they staged a theatrical protest at the New York Stock Exchange, raining single dollar bills onto the trading floor.

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<sup>65</sup> Liam Hess, “A Brief History of the T-Shirt” *Dazed Magazine*, dazeddigital.com, par. 6.

<sup>66</sup> Guetta, Guetta and Nieder, *Vintage T-Shirts*, 12.

<sup>67</sup> Young, *Dissent: The History of an American Idea*, 471.

<sup>68</sup> Craig J. Pearso, *Radical Theatrics: Put-Ons, Politics, and the Sixties*. (University of Washington Press, 2014), 60.

The Yippies were created in New York City on New Year's Eve, 1967. Greenwich Village had evolved into the eastern counterpart to Haight-Ashbury, often replicating events from the west coast three to six months later.<sup>69</sup> The Yippies spent the majority of 1968 planning their own contrasting Life Festival in Chicago at the same time. Chicago mayor Richard J. Daley rejected numerous permit applications from the Yippies in an attempt to thwart the hippie invasion of the city, but it was futile.

After months of preparation, the Anti-war Movement, the Student Movement and the counter culture descended upon Chicago. When the convention convened on August 25, 1968, protestors lined the streets shouting and chanting their dissatisfaction with the failing war and the state of the Democratic party. Hoffman, who had been inspired by Marshall McLuhan's society-altering decree of the "medium is the message"<sup>70</sup> chose to take every avenue possible to push the Yippie fantasy in front of the cameras. Hoffman and Rubin planned multiple forms of radical theatrics for their week in Chicago. One of these was the creation of the first protest T-shirts. The Yippie! Logo, which incorporated bold linework and psychedelic colouring, was easily transferable from posters to T-shirts. Hoffman believed that the brighter colours would draw more attention on camera.<sup>71</sup>

Another act of radical theatrics presented by the Yippie leaders was a pig named Pigasus, whom they intended to run for president in place of Senator Hubert Humphrey.<sup>72</sup> On the Thursday morning before the convention had even begun, Hoffman, Rubin, five other Yippie leaders and the pig were arrested. However, this did not deter the rest of the protestors. As

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<sup>69</sup> Haight-Ashbury held the first "Be-In" in January 14, 1967. The event was replicated on March 26 in Central Park, New York City. Goldberg, *In Search of the Lost Chord: 1967 and the Hippie Idea*, 322-323.

<sup>70</sup> Peariso, Craig J. *Radical Theatrics*, 47.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

nighttime fell, Chicago police attempted to forcibly remove the fifteen thousand hippies that had set up camp in Lincoln Park, but they were unsuccessful. The remaining four days of the Democratic National Convention resulted in a highly intense atmosphere both inside and outside the International Amphitheatre.



Figure 8 Youth International Party poster, with the official Yippie! Logo, advertising the Festival of Life. Courtesy of [chicago68.com](http://chicago68.com)



Figure 9 Yippie protestors being arrested at the DNC. The protestor on the right, possibly Jeff Rubin, is seen wearing a Yippie! T-shirt and helmet with the official logo. Courtesy of *LIFE* magazine





*Figure 12 Pigasus being presented at the DNC, Julian Wassner for LIFE Magazine*



*Figure 13 Protestors carry a banner promoting Pigasus for president, Julian Wassner for LIFE magazine*

September 1968 marked a change in the tide for the anti-war movement and the counterculture of the 1960s. The overwhelming feeling of unifying love that hippies had emphasized had resulted in the failure to stop the war in Vietnam and a highly sensationalized trial of the Chicago 7. The drug scene of Haight Ashbury and Greenwich Village was soon overrun with methamphetamine and crack cocaine.<sup>73</sup> Hippie culture was able to sustain long enough for the Woodstock Music and Art Festival in 1969, where Woodstock tees were sold, but decreased considerably in the years following. Entering into the 1970s, T-shirts and hippie

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<sup>73</sup> Goldberg, *In Search of the Lost Chord: 1967 and the Hippie Idea*, 305.

culture had become mainstream. The protest T-shirt would become a symbol of a bygone era. Disheartened and jaded, protest movements soon had to resort to violence in the name of peace.

### **The 1970s: High Art DIY Makeover**

The 1970s were forced to come to terms with the disillusionment the 1960s had left behind. Hippie culture had a vast influence on the United States in the 1970s. The heyday of Haight Ashbury was over but the style and messaging of the counterculture had become commonplace. By the mid-1970s, it was impossible to tell a Republican from a Democrat from a hippie.<sup>74</sup> Everyone wore their hair long and their jeans flared. The hippie idea of connecting with one's soul and body had evolved into an emphasis on the self. The 1970s was home to the "Me Generation"<sup>75</sup>, a mass focus on self-satisfaction over authentic love for others. The protest T-shirt would enter new areas in the 1970s, simultaneously true to its grassroots origins and further under the boot of commercialism.

The outwardly critical nature of the 1960s was still present in the 1970s. The Watergate scandal in 1974 under President Richard Nixon had allowed the masses more freedom to poke fun at higher authority. The jovial attitude was often seen on T-shirts, as people finally shed the fear of being targeted by national intelligence programs by the CIA (CHAOS) and FBI (COINTELPRO).<sup>76</sup> Their participation in the "Me Generation" was also on full display through their clothing. T-shirts could now announce to the world the wearer's perceived intelligence and self-confidence. It was not unusual to see someone wearing an ego inflating or government degrading apparel. By the late 1970s, these T-shirts were easily and widely available. A decade prior, they would only be available for purchase on the streets of the Bay area or hand made.

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<sup>74</sup> Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America*. (Oxford University Press, 2006), 27.

<sup>75</sup> Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society and Politics*. (Da Capo Press, 2002), 145.

<sup>76</sup> Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, 26.

Consumers could now enter could enter a big brand store to find ready-made revolutionary tees, specially targeted to them by Madison Avenue marketing agencies.<sup>77</sup>

The T-shirt would also become a statement in the art scene. The screen printing process had been introduced to high art in the 1960s by American pop artist Andy Warhol. In the 1970s screen-printing, T-shirts and high art were combined by one of the most visible couples of the twentieth century; Beatles frontman John Lennon and artist Yoko Ono. They continued in the tradition of the T-shirt as a means of radical theatrics. The couple had forged a bond based on art, music and the greater understanding of life as they knew it, themes that would resonate in the art they made together.

December 15, 1971, John and Yoko are photographed in Toronto holding a poster reading ‘WAR IS OVER! If you want it’ as part of their ongoing Campaign for Peace. The message was seen worldwide, with large billboards and newspaper ads in 11 major cities. In Toronto, over 30 billboards were plastered throughout the downtown core.<sup>78</sup> In New York City, a billboard was strategically placed across from the Marines recruitment centre in Times Square.<sup>79</sup> The format, a stark white background with bold black lettering would serve as a blueprint for protest T-shirts to come. The T-shirts Yoko sold at her art shows, asking the viewer to question anything and everything, mirrored this form and added a black background and white text variation.<sup>80</sup> Much like the billboards and ads, the T-shirt would spread messaging far and wide,

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<sup>77</sup> Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (University of Chicago Press, 1997), 216.

<sup>78</sup> Tim Gihring, Minneapolis Institute of Art. “It was 50 years ago today in 1969, John Lennon and Yoko Ono surprised the world with their legendary “War is Over” campaign. Here’s how it Happened.” [artsmia.medium.com](https://artsmia.medium.com). Published 13 Dec, 2019. Accessed 26 Jan, 2021. Par 4.

<sup>79</sup> Andrew Jackson Grant, *Still the Greatest: The Essential Songs of the Beatles’ Solo Careers*. (Scarecrow Press Inc., 2012), 49.

<sup>80</sup> Bob Gruen, *Ripped: T-Shirts from the Underground*. Ed. Cesar Padilla. (New York, NY: Universe Publishing, 2010), 11.

disseminated onto an individual level. John and Yoko were not the only revolutionary pair to bring the T-shirt to new heights, as it was a role that was also filled across the ocean in the UK.<sup>81</sup>



Figure 14 Yoko Ono "Why Not" T-Shirt, 1970s



Figure 15 Yoko Ono "Why" T-Shirt, 1970s

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<sup>81</sup> Sam Bully, "John Lennon and Yoko Ono's use of slogans on T-shirts", *Slogan T-Shirts: Cult and Culture*, 22.



Figure 16 Yoko Ono "Fly" T-Shirt, 1970s

In London, England, the punk movement was carrying the counterculture of the late 1970s. Similar to the Haight-Ashbury counterculture, punk was only active for a few years. From 1975 to 1978, UK punks were driven by an anxiety about the state of the country. Unemployment hit an all-time high in 1977, amid the worst recession the UK had seen since the 1930s.<sup>82</sup> The punk movement was highly visual, punk DIY style incorporated everyday objects as apparel. Hair was brightly coloured and spiked, makeup smudged and bodies modified through piercings and tattoos. While on the surface it appeared to be pure mayhem, it was a scene that was carefully crafted by the architect of punk, Malcolm McLaren. If McLaren was the architect of punk, then his creative partner Vivienne Westwood was the engineer. From within the four walls of their shop at 430 King's Road in London,<sup>83</sup> McLaren conceived of ways to

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<sup>82</sup> John Savage and Jamie Reid, "Punk's use of slogan T-shirts", *Slogan T-Shirts: Cult and Culture*, 23.

<sup>83</sup> The shop at 430 King's Road underwent rebranding on multiple occasions in the 1970s. First opened as Let It Rock in 1971-1973, then Too Fast Too Live, Too Young to Die in 1973-1974, SEX 1974-1976, Seditonaries 1976-1980, before Vivienne Westwood opened World's End at the same location in 1980 where it remains today. Matthew Worley, "The slogan T-shirt as a subcultural tactic" *Slogan T-Shirts: Cult and Culture*, 31.

reinvent the T-shirt and Westwood executed his vision. McLaren and Westwood went beyond pushing the envelope, they tore it apart and then stuck it back together. Shirts were soon ripped and fastened with safety pins, adorned with silver studs, and zippers were sown onto women's shirts over the breast to expose the nipple at the wearer's behest.<sup>8485</sup>



Figure 17 Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren in their shop, *Seditonaries*, late 1970s. Beresford, Jessica. "Vivienne Westwood: A Rebel with a Cause." *The Rake*. Accessed Jan, 2021. <https://therake.com/stories/icons/vivienne-westwood-rebel-with-a-cause/>

The pair's T-shirt designs were nothing less than shocking. Using a children's screen-printing set, the pair exploiting the fear surrounding the at large Cambridge Rapist, printed images of nude adolescent boys and nude cowboys. McLaren, having been introduced to the Marxist group Situationist International in his Croyden Art College days, began envisioning Marxist leaders printed onto shirts.<sup>86</sup> The resulting Marxist-anarchist shirt presents philosopher Karl Marx juxtaposed with anarchist slogans. For London in the 1970s, it was all far too egregious, and the pair were arrested for 'exposing the public view to an indecent exhibition' and

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<sup>84</sup> Savage and Reid, "Punk's use of slogan T-shirts", *Slogan T-Shirts*, 25-26.

<sup>85</sup> Due to rights restrictions, an image of the zipper T-shirt from the MET Costume Institute could not be included in the online exhibit. "T-Shirt: Vivienne Westwood", Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Costume Institute, Accession No. 2018.765, accessed Jan 26, 2021.

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/789207?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&deptids=8&ft=T-shirt&offset=20&rpp=20&pos=28>

<sup>86</sup> Worley, "The slogan T-shirt as a subcultural tactic", *Slogan T-Shirts*, 31.

fined fifty pounds.<sup>87</sup> <sup>88</sup> The pair also worked closely with artist Jamie Reid to create the signature punk cut-and-paste style as merchandise for The Sex Pistols. As manager for the band, McLaren could evolve the punk style with more anti-authoritarian undertones to evoke stronger reactions.



Figure 18 Destroy printed shirt, Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren, 1977. From the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Museum Number: T773-1995.



Figure 19 Cambridge Rapist T-shirt, Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren, 1977-1978. From the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Museum Number: T-232.1993.

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<sup>87</sup> Savage and Reid, “Punk’s use of slogan T-shirts”, *Slogan T-Shirts*, 26.

<sup>88</sup> Due to rights restrictions, an image of Anarchist-Marxist shirt from the MET Costume Institute could not be included in the online exhibit. “Anarchy Karl Marx Shirt: Vivienne Westwood”, 1976-1977, Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Costume Institute, accession No. 2018.765, accessed Jan 26, 2021. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/789273?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&deptids=8&ft=Vivienne+Westwood&offset=140&rpp=20&pos=157>



*Figure 20 The Sex Pistols, 'Anarchy in the UK' cut and paste style T-shirt. Jamie Reid, 1976. From the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Museum Number: S.794-1990*

Back in the United States, the New York Dolls, the Dead Kennedy's and Blondie carried the punk torch from New York City, meeting and playing with UK punk icons frequently. The American punk era would evolve into New Wave, a more glam and commercial friendly variant. By the late 1970s, it was common to see T-shirts promoting blockbuster movies, the biggest bands of the day and pop culture icons. Athletic companies also began endorsing their T-shirts with adapted versions of their logos. The printed T-shirt had grown from a cottage industry, to big business.

The end of the 1970s would sow the seeds of what would become of America in the 1980s. Disillusionment had turned into violence, crime rates skyrocketed, cities were cesspools of illicit activities with little police funding to curb the crime surge. Many in the United States who felt the dreams of the 1960s were doomed from the start demanded a new administration with more stringent values. In 1979, they found the right man; Ronald Reagan. The Reagan administration changed the face of America irreversibly. While America may have received a makeover in the era of the supermodel, it was still wearing a T-shirt.

### **The 1980s: Mainstream Crossover**

The 1980s is often identified with bright aesthetics, neon decals and electronically infused music. It is remembered for an emphasis on mass consumerism, as shopping malls



became the central hub of American social life across the country. Through the thick fog of hairspray and acid-wash denim, political unrest continued to poke through. The protest T-shirt would enter its most influential stage in the 1980s, gaining worldwide exposure as it was utilized in the world of global politics.

Ronald Reagan's win in the 1980 presidential election solidified the end of a dying free love movement. Free enterprise was now able to take centre stage.<sup>89</sup> The Conservative Christian Movement, formed by majority white middle class Americans, sought an administration that would cater to their issues over those of minorities. The previous two decades had left them feeling victimized and at a disadvantage.<sup>90</sup> Ronald Reagan represented strong family values, would be tough on crime, and was staunchly anti-communist. President Reagan entered the White House in 1981 with the promise of reinvigorating the American economy, under a plan that would be known since as Reaganomics, and renewing the American spirit. To best achieve this, the Reagan administration began an aggressive War on Drugs, dubbed the "Just Say No" campaign, which ultimately targeted minority groups and did little to stop the flow of drugs coming into the country. Combined with the War on Crime, many offenders were given extended sentences for non-violent crimes.

Similarly, Great Britain saw an influx of conservative leadership and the dissent that followed. An act of radical theatrics through a protest T-shirt made international headlines in March 1984, when acclaimed British fashion designer Katharine Hamnett met UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher donning a large boxy white T-shirt that read 58% DON'T WANT PERSHING. The shirt was a commentary on a recent poll that stated 58% of Thatcher's constituents did not approve of the UK's unauthorized purchasing of American Pershing nuclear

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<sup>89</sup> Young, *Dissent: The History of an American Idea*, 499.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 491.

missiles. The meeting was intended to be purely social, Thatcher wanted to meet Hamnet at the end of London Fashion Week to congratulate her on her success and commend her for promoting English fashion. When Hamnet removed her coat, mere moments before the Iron Lady shook her hand, she knew she would create a statement and a sensation.<sup>91</sup> Upon seeing the shirt, Thatcher remarked, “You seem to have a very strong message on your shirt.”<sup>92</sup> According to one source, it was one of the few times the prime minister was visibly startled.<sup>93</sup> Hamnett continued to make an impact in the US when the band Wham! wore Hamnett’s T-shirt emblazed with “CHOOSE LIFE” in the music video for *Wake Me Up! (Before You Go Go)*. Intended to be a commentary on the state of the ongoing heroin and suicide epidemic, it was confused for pro-life propaganda, as women’s rights were at the forefront of public consciousness at the time.



Figure 21 Katharine Hamnett meeting Margaret Thatcher. Hess, Liam. “A Brief History of the Political T-Shirt” *Dazed Magazine*

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<sup>91</sup> Katharine Hamnett, “The protest t-shirts you see today tend to be a bit namby- pamby.” *The Guardian*, published 8 Mar, 2018, par. 1.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 2.

<sup>93</sup> Hess, “A Brief History of the Political T-Shirt”, *Dazed Magazine*, par. 9.

President Reagan's focus on the economy and lack of concern for minority groups was the most evident during the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) epidemic. In June 1981, the Centers for Disease Control reported a rare cancer present in 41 homosexual men.<sup>94</sup> The inaction of the Reagan administration to alert the public to the virus, conduct research and implement adequate protocols ultimately led to the deaths of thousands. The HIV virus was not identified or named until 1983, and no diagnostic test was available until 1985.<sup>95</sup> By mid-1987, over 36,000 Americans had been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, and 20,000 of them had died.<sup>96</sup> Assisting a minority group, which comprised of mostly homosexual men and immigrants, would not have sat well with Reagan's constituents. This created the perfect conditions for the virus to spread unchecked for nearly a decade, as state officials used the opportunity to arrest prostitutes and close down LGBT public spaces in the name of public health.<sup>97</sup>

Left with no government assistance, LGBT activists groups came together to form the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in 1987. The action group soon unveiled what would become an iconic symbol in the fight against AIDS, the inverted pink triangle. Used by the Nazi's to identify homosexuals in concentration camps, the pink triangle was reclaimed by the LGBT community as a symbol of power.<sup>98</sup> Paired with the slogan SILENCE = DEATH, the resulting T-shirt created a shocking and provocative call to action. The full power of ACT UP was on display on December 10, 1989, when the group confronted the archdiocese and Cardinal John O'Connor. Cardinal O'Connor had employed extensive campaigns to spread misinformation about the spread of AIDS, stating that safe sex would not protect against the

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<sup>94</sup> Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, (Boston: Beacon Books Press, 2011), 224.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 227.

<sup>98</sup> Hess, *A Brief History of the Political T Shirt*, par. 6.

virus, and lobbied to cancel a program that handed out condoms in high schools.<sup>99</sup> The demonstration resulted in the arrest of 111 protestors and nationwide attention. Ultimately, the efforts of ACT UP led to the Food and Drug Administration shortening drug trial periods to two years, making treatment available sooner and saving lives.



Figure 22 ACT UP T-shirt. *wearinggayhistory.com*. From the collection of IHLIA LGBT Heritage-- Amsterdam, Netherlands.



Figure 23 ACT UP T-shirts. *wearinggayhistory.com*. From the collection of IHLIA LGBT Heritage-- Amsterdam, Netherlands.

The 1980s cast a shadow over the efforts of the previous two decades with the conservative emphasis on reinstating the status quo. Individual material wealth took precedent over civil liberties. The effects of globalization and Reaganomics would become the top of the

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<sup>99</sup> Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 234.

public agenda in the 1990s, and the political T-shirt would adapt to a more subversive form to spread its message.

### **The 1990s: Branded in Irony**

Reaganomics and the 1980s changed the way mass markets operated domestically and globally. T-shirts, while still important symbols of personal beliefs, had lost its connection to radical theatrics. A minority few stayed true to the origins of the protest T-shirt of the late 1960s, but branding became more prominent as the apparel industry continued to grow. What a T-shirt said or projected about the wearer was more reliant on a logo than any cause it could promote.<sup>100</sup> While many consumers could promote artists and current events through the medium, T-shirts failed to make the political statement they would have a decade prior. Ultimately, the most notable garment of the decade was the blue dress owned by Monica Lewinsky that entangled President Bill Clinton in scandal, not a cheap T-shirt.

Branding on T-shirts was not a new concept, the relationship between the two had been formed by California surfer shops in the late 1940s. The late 1970s and 1980s saw branding become increasingly important in streetwear. The 1990s ushered in a new phase of this relationship when T-shirts made a debut on the runway with the Chanel Spring/Summer 1992 collection.<sup>101</sup> High end brands now adopted tees to promote their image. For the average person, a plain T-shirt with a printed logo was the cheapest item available from a luxury brand. It bridged the gap between those at the edge of access and those with excess. For those still unable to afford the cheapest items from a brand, issues of classism and racism emerged.

On April 29, 1992, Los Angeles erupted in flames as the news that four officers accused of beating Rodney King, an African American, were acquitted. King had become the face of

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<sup>100</sup> Neil Boorman, "The slogan T-shirt's relationship to branding", *Slogan T-Shirts: Cult and Culture*, 48.

<sup>101</sup> Guetta, Guetta and Neider, *Vintage T-Shirts*, 12.

police brutality when his beating at the hands of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) in March 1991 was captured on camera by bystander George Holliday. King's harrowing experience left him with permanent nerve damage in his face and multiple broken bones. It was not unique for African Americans living under the jurisdiction of the LAPD,<sup>102</sup> but it was the first time such an incident had received widespread backlash. News outlets across the country had obtained the tape. The Rodney King Riots brought six days of chaos to Los Angeles, centred at the intersection of Florence St. and Normandie St., a predominantly black neighborhood. It was the first race riot in the city since 1968. On the first night of the riots, looting had begun. Protestors began stealing brand name appliances, electronics and apparel from big box stores. While some kept the items for personal use, most was intended to be sold elsewhere.<sup>103</sup> The Rodney King Riots were a complex, multi-racial event. One that symbolized a nation which had continued to outgrow an antiquated system based on the preferential treatment of white men since the Civil Rights Movement. The looting was a small part of the violence, of which the police and fire department stopped responding to.<sup>104</sup> The city was left with 64 dead, thousands wounded and over one billion dollars in damage.

The 1990s were defined by the intersection of technology, media and personal expression. Protest music permeated the private sphere in new ways, and was often subliminal. Dissent had found a safe haven in the hyperspace on Music Television (MTV). Originally entering the air waves in 1981, MTV was an immediate success. By the mid-1990s, MTV had changed some of its programming to reality tv, but music videos remained central to the MTV identity. Music videos were no longer consisted of filmed performances, but full scale

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<sup>102</sup>The LAPD chief of police had a history of recruiting officers from the South for their oppressive tactics towards marginalized groups. Nina Serianne Esperanza, *America in the Nineties*, (Syracuse University Press, 2015), 175.

<sup>103</sup> Esperanza, *America in the Nineties*, 178.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

productions with sets, costumes, story lines and effects.<sup>105</sup> The two most prevalent genres of the decade, hip hop and grunge, utilized MTV to spread their dissenting message.

Race relations in the United States suffered a painful setback as a result of the Los Angeles Riots of 1992. The policies in Reagan's War Against Crime incarcerated millions and led to immense stress on the prison system. In response to the overflow of inmates, the Clinton administration reallocated funds from public housing to reinforce existing prisons and build new ones.<sup>106</sup> (President Clinton was constantly engulfed by personal scandals, most infamously with White House intern Monica Lewinsky in 1997, and perhaps too busy to adequately resolve the issue). Hip hop and rap, an underground phenomena that had been developing for several generations, gave a marginalized community of African Americans an outlet to vent frustrations with the system. The Notorious BIG, NWA and Tupac Shakur dominated the airwaves with messaging about the experiences of the underprivileged, and a distrust of law enforcement, conditions which had not improved for decades. Those that identified with these messages could wear T-shirts promoting their favourite artists.

Grunge music, carried by the band Nirvana and its frontman Kurt Cobain, drew on similar criticisms of the establishment and expression of ideas as rap and hip hop. Grunge had also found a home on MTV, where the music video for *Smells Like Teen Spirit* was in frequent demand, and fans could identify themselves wearing band apparel. The grunge movement came from working class communities, who had not benefited from Reaganomics like those involved with Wall Street.<sup>107</sup> Grunge music often addressed themes of disillusionment, the inherent

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>106</sup> Esperanza, *America in the Nineties*, 185.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 142.

hypocrisy of commercialism and general dissatisfaction with life itself. The “Seattle Sound”<sup>108</sup> lost momentum with the death of Cobain in 1994, and by the end of the decade become obsolete.

The protest T-shirt would introduce a level of irony through the success of the Che Guevara T-shirt in the 1990s. It speaks to the often-paradoxical nature of how protest T-shirts have been commodified, even co-opted, over the years by consumer capitalism. An image of Guevara taken at a funeral service in 1960 by photographer Alberto Korda, titled *Guerillero Heroico*, had become a commercial success in the United States and globally.<sup>109</sup> Guevara was an icon of rebellion and revolution, having aided the Castro brothers in the overtaking of Cuba in 1959 and establishing a communist regime. Guevara himself was not a fan of American rebellion, once remarking that if you “asked American leftists to form a firing squad, they’d get into a circle.”<sup>110</sup> The popularity of Guevara’s image exemplifies the state of the protest T-shirt at the turn of the millennium. It existed somewhat in a state of illusionment. While those that purchased Guevara ephemera wanted to align themselves with a radical revolutionary, many glossed over the inherent irony of promoting a radical communist on a shirt they bought from a shopping mall.

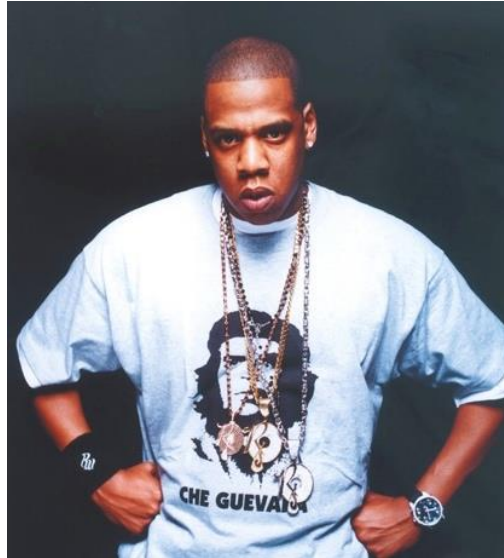
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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Emma Hope Allwood, “How the Che Guevara T-shirt became a global phenomenon” *Dazed Magazine*, dazeddigital.com, published 26 July, 2016, par 2.

<sup>110</sup> Goldberg, *The Lost Chord: 1967 and the Hippie Idea*, 20.





*Figure 24 American Rapper Jay-Z wearing a Che Guevara T-shirt, late 1990s. Dazed Magazine.*

In the decades that followed the 1990s, the relationship between commercialism and protest T-shirts began to find a natural balance, albeit at a significantly faster pace. The T-shirt continues to be mass produced, and the rise and proliferation of the internet into everyday life has given the protest T-shirt a shorter shelf life. A T-shirt calling for peace and love in the 1960s that could speak to all eras has been replaced by the hyper specific identification of current issues. In the summer of 2020, Black Lives Matter protests surged in response to the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd at the hands of the authorities, and sparked the production of several T-shirts. On January 6, 2021, extreme right wing radicals stormed the US Capitol Building in Washington D.C in an attempt to thwart the election of President Joe Biden. Many attended the event declaring “Civil War” and glorifying the use of concentration camps during the Holocaust during the Second World War. Both of these movements facilitated discussion about the ethics of commercially made protest T-shirts, resulting in the removal of some from

online retailers.<sup>111112</sup> Protest T-shirts are more accessible than ever but it comes at a price. They are available to those fighting for equality and democracy and to those fighting against it.

Democracy and free speech are a packaged deal, a principle that must be constantly reinforced.

But for the times voices cannot be heard over the noise, we can always wear a T-shirt.



Figure 25 front and back of a Breonna Taylor T-shirt, <https://phenomenalwoman.us/products/breonna-taylor-T-shirt>

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<sup>111</sup> “Amazon removes T-shirt showing George Floyd death” *BBC News*, [bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-52978193). Published 9 June, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-52978193>

<sup>112</sup> Jason Del Rey, “Shopify hits President Trump where it hurts: his wallet.” *Vox*, [vox.com](https://www.vox.com/recode/22218863/shopify-bans-trump-store-merch-capitol-facebook-twitter), published Jan 7, 2021. <https://www.vox.com/recode/22218863/shopify-bans-trump-store-merch-capitol-facebook-twitter>

## Chapter 6: Conclusion – What will come of museums after COVID?

COVID-19 has changed the future of the museum in ways not fully realized. Concerns for the future of the museum employee, visitor experience and exhibition design are an active part of the discourse in analyzing what museums post-COVID will entail. As an immediate response to the pandemic, many museums reformatted their offerings to be accessible online.<sup>113</sup> Programming has become virtual, with children’s activities and curator talks becoming available through video conferencing. If a museum had not already begun to digitize their collections, the pandemic certainly provided the initiative to start. Moving a collection solely online, as stated throughout, is not a viable option for the longevity of an institution. This impacts not only the financial aspects of museum work but the interactivity between the public and institutions as well.

For areas not in lockdown, timed tickets, redirected markings and required face masks are a temporary solution. As pointed out by architect Bea Spolidoro, museums are not considered high-risk environment for the transmission of COVID, depending on the type of facility, “you cannot touch anything in a museum, and [art] museums are fairly quiet” Spolidoro adds, “You don’t have to raise your voice. So, you can make the case that when you are in the museum, you don’t have to speak loud and project more particles.”<sup>114</sup> While this may curb anxieties in the short term, long-term infrastructural changes will have to be made. The architecture of buildings designed to house museum collections will have to be created with social distancing in mind and provide ample walking room both inside and outside the facility.

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<sup>113</sup> Christine Spolar, “When the world reopens, will art museums still be there?” *National Geographic*, nationalgeographic.com, published December, 2020, par. 8.

<sup>114</sup> Jennifer Billock, “How Will Covid Change the Way Museums are Built?” *Smithsonian Magazine*, smithsonianmagazine.com, published 16 September, 2020, par. 7.

## Conclusion

Michael Govan, director of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, commented to *Smithsonian Magazine* that the loss of the physical space in preference for the digital would be a “huge loss” for the entirety of the museum experience.<sup>115</sup> There simply is not a replacement for the tangible immersion of a museum. To demote the museum to a mausoleum intended only to house to the physical counterparts of a digital experience would be a massive cultural loss, not only for contemporary audience but for those of the future. The better alternative, states Govan, is to move the museum experience outside where it is easier to enforce social distancing.<sup>116</sup> If the exhibition is to move to the great outdoors, then new concerns over conservation and display will have to be considered. Namely, the effects of weather and direct sunlight can have on an artefacts conservation and longevity. The materials needed to create such displays will need to be considerably more durable for the same reason, depending on the duration of the exhibit. Security of an outdoor gallery must be a priority as well, as the vulnerability of artefacts will be increased if they are left in their display positions overnight. The digital replication of the exhibition is a cheaper alternative to these massive adjustments, but will cost institutions more on the long run.

*Politics Through T-Shirts: A History of Protest*, as stated, is a product of its time. It is an online exhibition by an independent curator with no physical access to collections during a pandemic. It is an extraordinary set of circumstances, without the inclusion of tackling a faction of fashion history that has only been recently realized. The work of connecting fashion, ordinary garments and social movements is filled with unrealized potential, as there are numerous other garments that would benefit the socio-political research lens. Miniskirts, which rose to popularity

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<sup>115</sup> Billock, “How Will Covid Change the Way Museums are Built?” *Smithsonian Magazine*, par. 24.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 25.

## Conclusion

in the 1960s thanks to the work of English designer Mary Quant, could easily be juxtaposed alongside advancements in the feminist movement.

Such advancements will have to wait, at least until the world is in a position to facilitate such work again. However, the combination of fashion curation and digital history has only been validated by the onset of COVID, and it is reasonable to assume that more immersive online exhibitions will be displayed within the next few years. Should a time come when a completely socially distant museum experience become available, it is not unreasonable to assume that a large component of those displays will be facilitated through a viewer's personal smartphone. The future is just as uncertain as ever, but the museum field is filled with passionate and dedicated workers who will embrace changes in technology and social circumstances to preserve our histories, and enable the public to access these stories. No matter how far apart we are forced to be, history will always bring us together.

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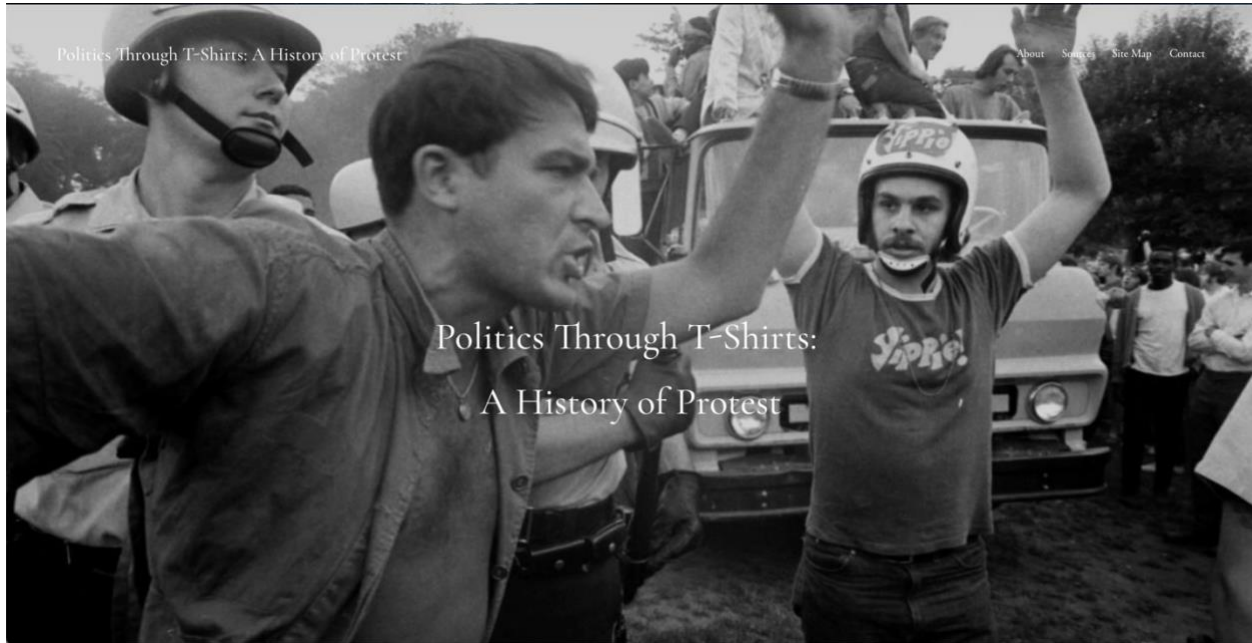
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## Appendix A

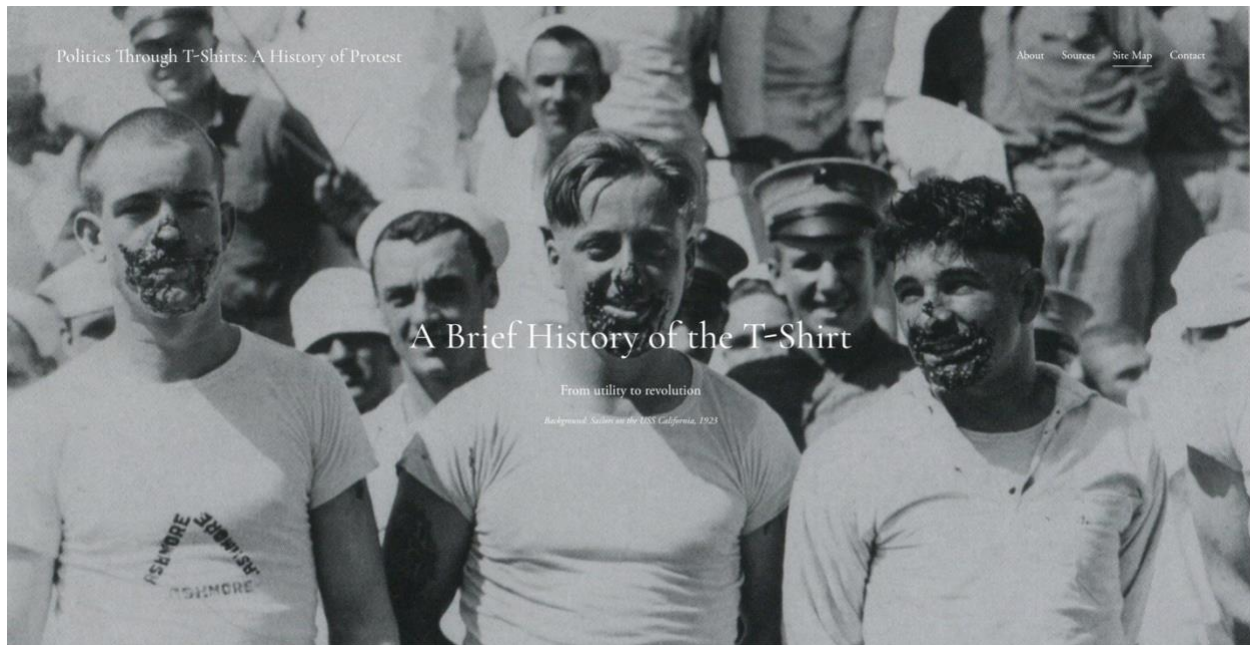
Screenshots of the digital exhibition, *Politics Through T-Shirts: A History of Protest*



*Appendix A1: Introductory section on the "Home" page*



*Appendix A2: Links to the various decades in Politics Through T-Shirts on the "Home" page*



Appendix A3: Introductory section of the "A Brief History of the T-Shirt" page

In 1913, the t-shirt was incorporated into the US Navy's official uniform, categorized as lightweight short sleeve cotton vests. [4] They would remain an unseen undergarment until the Second World War, when off-duty servicemen were seen by the public in news publications enjoying leisure time in their undershirts. The term 't-shirt' first appeared in the 1920 novel, *This Side of Paradise*, by American author F. Scott Fitzgerald, and added to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary the same year. [5]

In the inter-war period, the t-shirt had already made its fashion debut among women's styles. Pressed by fabric shortages in France following the First World War, famed designer Coco Chanel came across the simple garment and incorporated it into her subsequent collections. The look was soon adopted by French women, but failed to make an impact with women in the US.

*Image: Corporal Alexander Le Gerda, member of the 853rd Ordnance Company, on the cover of LIFE magazine July 13, 1942. The magazine states that the "shirt he is wearing is part of his athletic equipment."*

*Courtesy of Google x Life Magazine*

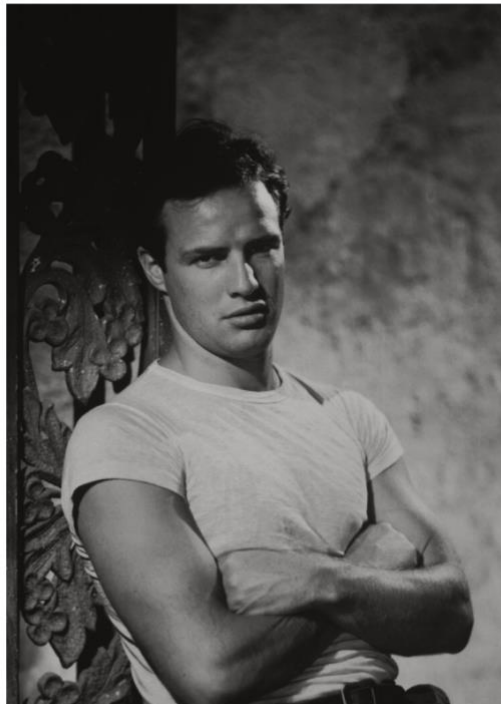
Appendix A4: Section of "A Brief History of the T-Shirt" page, using a cover of LIFE magazine as a supporting document

Civilian men, however, began to incorporate the piece into their wardrobes. In its infancy, 1940s California surfer culture began knitting images into heavier t-shirts and experimented with branding. [6]Motorcycle gangs that roamed the California coast such as the Hell's Angels wore them under their insignia-embazoned vests.[7] It was the singular style of these bands of degenerates that captured the imagination of Hollywood and solidified the t-shirt as an icon of rebellion, youth culture and dissent.

*Image: Early heavy knit tee with imagery. California, ca.1940*



*Appendix A5: Section of "A Brief History of the T-Shirt" page, featuring a heavy knit tee*



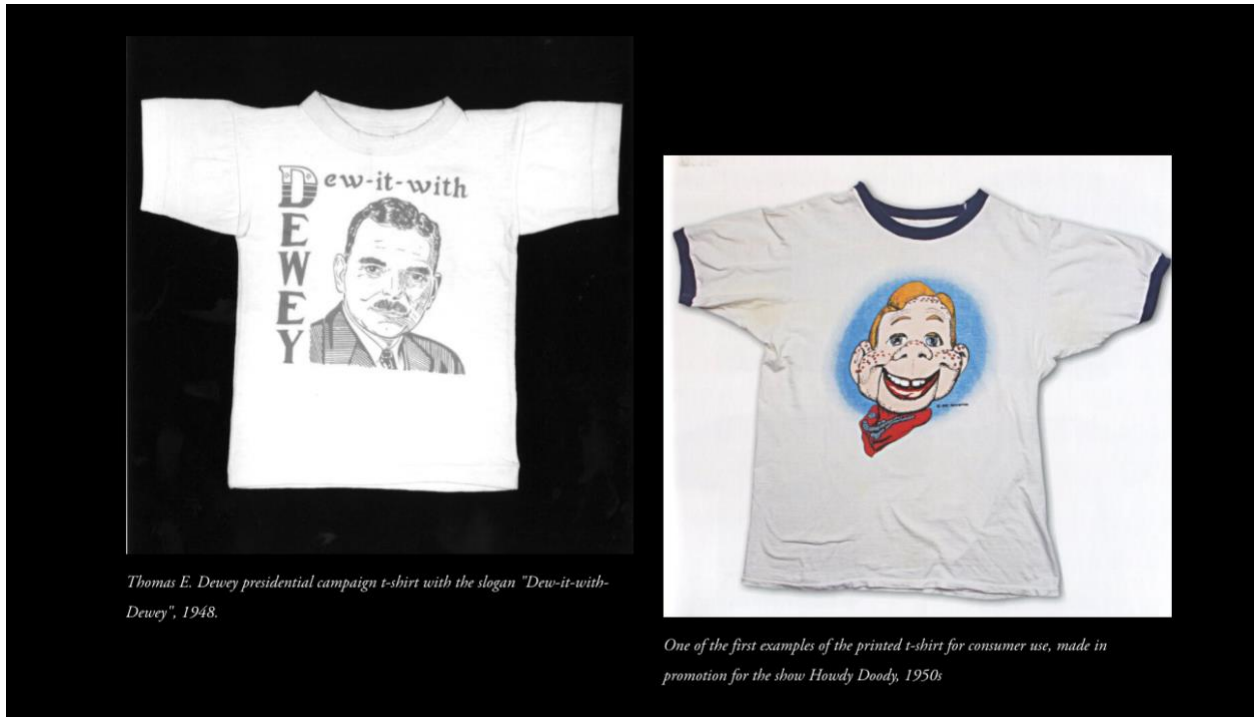
Two of the most prolific actors of the 1950s, Marlon Brando and James Dean, rose to fame clad in a tight white t-shirt. Brando in *The Wild One* (1953), emulating the aforementioned motorcycle gang culture, and in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) as the dreamy but despotic drunk Stanley Kowalski.

Dean, in one of his four films before his untimely death, *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), created a sensation that woke the masses of America up to the rebellious nature of the t-shirt.

Simultaneously, the t-shirts association with the working man and servicemen epitomized the strengthening of American values that defined the 1950s. The t-shirt promoted how to be rebelliously cool while still uniquely American.

*Image: Brando, in a publicity still for A Streetcar Named Desire, 1951*

*Appendix A6: Section of "A Brief History of the T-Shirt" page, featuring Marlon Brando*



Appendix A7: Section of "A Brief History of the T-Shirt" page, featuring two early examples of printed T-shirts



Appendix A8: Introductory section of "The 1960s" page.



*Kellogg's cereal advertisement featuring a little boy wearing a t-shirt.*



*Fruit of the Loom advertisement targeting the older male demographic, who wore the t-shirt as an undershirt in the late 1960s.*

Appendix A9: Section of "The 1960s" page, using T-shirt advertisements from LIFE magazine.



*Freedom Summer volunteers and locals canvas neighbourhoods in Mississippi, 1964.*

The 1960s were an overlapping minefield of social revolutionary movements, created by the momentum of the Civil Rights Movement that had begun in the mid 1950s. Freedom Summer in 1964 attracted students nationwide to southern states to aid in voter registration.<sup>[2]</sup> Upon returning to their respective campuses in the fall, students were proud to show off their battle scars and tell stories from their intrepid missions.

Appendix A10: Section from "The 1960s" page, image from NPR showing activists in Mississippi during Freedom Summer, 1964.



*Mario Savio, student and CORE activist, speaking from the top of the police car. Oct. 1, 1964*

At the University of California at Berkeley, graduate student Jack Weinberg was arrested while manning a booth for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) for violating the university's policy against political activism. [3] Enraged and emboldened from their experiences over the summer, students mobilized. The Free Speech Movement began in the fall of 1964 and inspired campuses nationwide. Students now felt it was their civic duty to critique the authoritative powers that not only controlled campuses, but the nation as a whole.



*Jack Weinberg, student and CORE activist, in the back seat of the police car. Oct. 1, 1964*

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*Appendix A11: Section from "The 1960s" page, showing the start of the Student Rights Movement at UC Berkley, 1964.*

The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), formed in 1962, sought to enable students to speak freely about social and political issues. The SDS organized teach-ins, seminars and workshops that would run at night. Visiting scholars and intellectuals debated the ethical implications of American involvement in the war in Vietnam throughout 1964 and 1965.

As President Johnson initiated on the ground American involvement in 1965 through Operation Rolling Thunder, the division between pro and anti-Vietnam groups became more hostile.

*Background, footage of Operation Rolling Thunder*

*Appendix A12: Section from "The 1960s" page, utilizing a YouTube video uploaded by Smithsonian Magazine of Operation Rolling Thunder as background.*

The effects of the Vietnam War rippled throughout the country. The counterculture of the 1960s was a mass component of the anti-war movement, which included members of the Student Movement and Civil Rights Movement. The hub of the counterculture, the Haight Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco, had witnessed a mass exodus of young people throughout the mid 1960s seeking solace from the tension that engulfed the rest of the country. Between 1965 and 1967, an estimated one hundred thousand people moved into the twenty five block area.<sup>[4]</sup> The draft had threatened the livelihoods of many not willing to put their lives on the line for a war they did not believe in.

The hippies of Haight-Ashbury believed they could solve the world's problems through free love, peace and a considerable amount of psychedelic drugs. Hippie culture emphasized a rejection of the status quo that had restricted their parent's generation,<sup>[5]</sup> and the unconventional nature of the t-shirt was a natural fit for this environment. The t-shirt was expected to be worn by men under a collared shirt, by children or for athletics. The act of wearing one casually in public, especially by a woman, was provocative.



*Peggy Caserta, owner of hippie boutique Mnasidika in Haight-Ashbury, wearing a surfer-style t-shirt. Friend and leather smith Bobby Boles sits next to her wearing a sport-style t-shirt over a dark turtleneck. Late 1960s.*

*Appendix A13: Section from "The 1960s" page, showing two members of the Haight-Ashbury counterculture from Vulture Magazine.*



*Young couple walking the streets of Haight Ashbury, 1967.*

Similarly to the anti-war movement itself, the t-shirt had become considerably more revolutionary in just a few years. It was cheap and disposable, much like the draft cards that were burned at anti-war rallies across the country. T-shirts soon underwent a countercultural makeover, utilizing the Indian practise of *bandhi* to create psychedelic tie-dye t-shirts. DIY silk-screening and the new technology of heat transfer inks and papers created shirts that would be sold by hippie vendors in the streets of Haight-Ashbury and at music festivals. The baby boomer generation could now express political affiliations and musical preference through their t-shirts.<sup>[6]</sup>

*Appendix A14: Section from "The 1960s" page, with a photo from LIFE magazine showing a young couple in Haight-Ashbury*

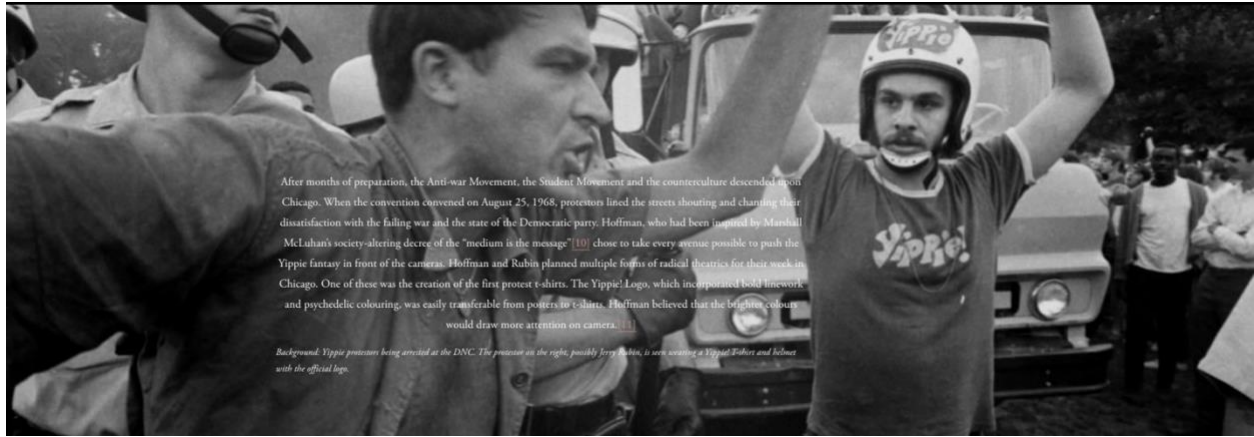




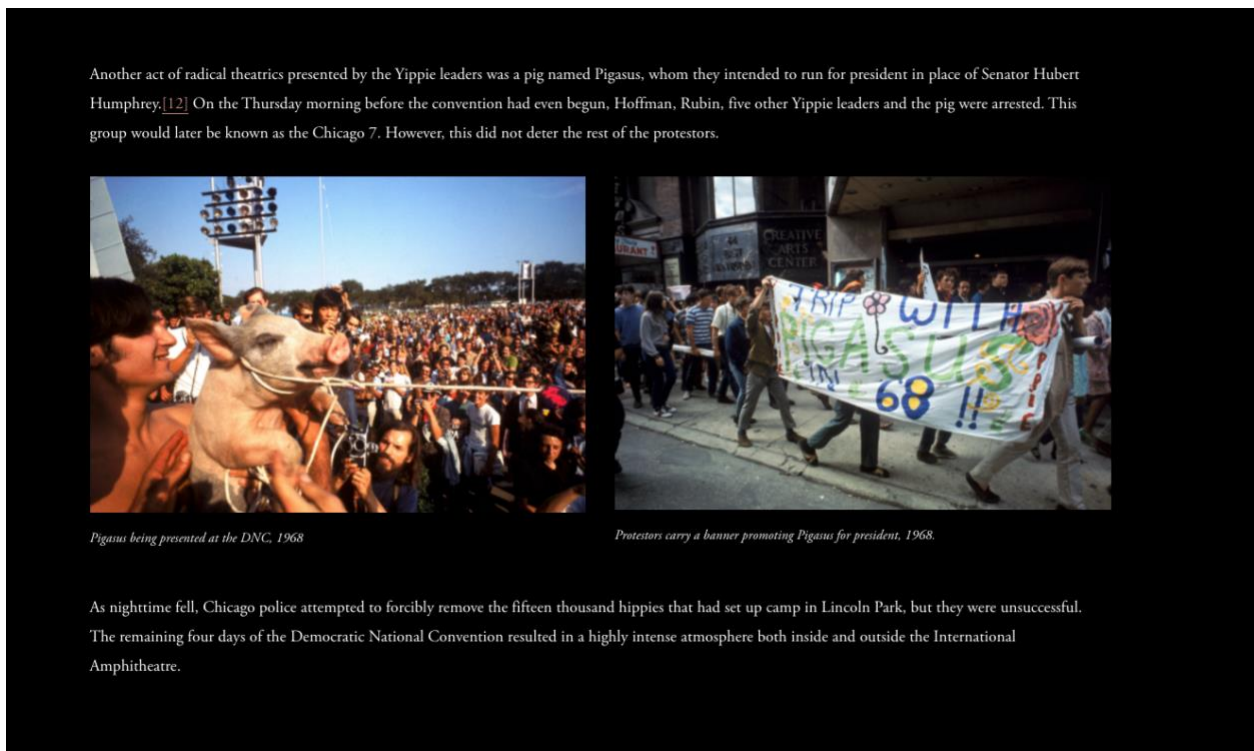
Appendix A15: Section from "The 1960s" page, image from LIFE magazine showing protests at the 1968 DNC in Chicago.



Appendix A16: Section from "The 1960s" page, showing Abbie Hoffman and Jeff Rubin, as well as a Yippie! poster for the Festival of Life



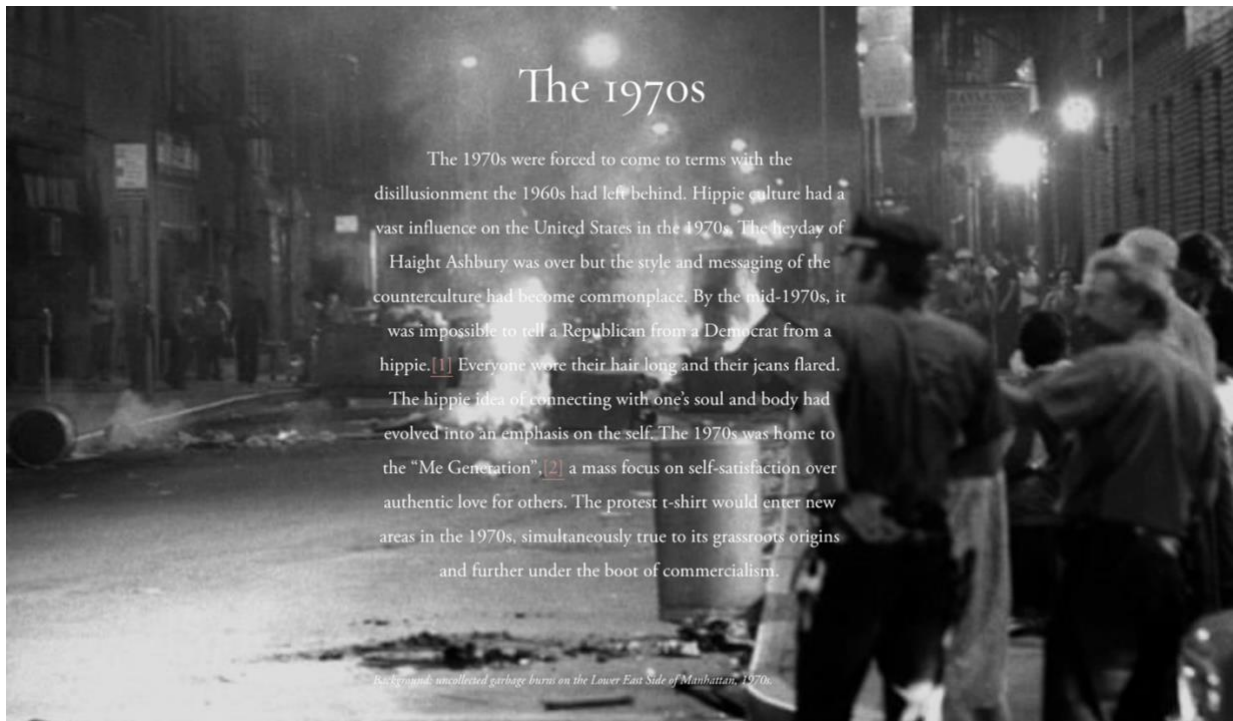
*Appendix A17: Section from "The 1960s", with a photo of two Yippie protestors being arrested at the 1968 DNC from LIFE magazine as the background*



*Appendix A18: Section from "The 1960s" page, showing other acts of protest at the 1968 DNC in Chicago*



Appendix A19: Conclusion section from "The 1960s" page, highlighting two Woodstock Music and Art Festival T-shirts from the collection of The National Museum of American History, against a photo of the festival as the background



Appendix A20: Introductory section of the "1970s" page



Front of slogan t-shirt, 1979



Back of slogan t-shirt, 1979

The outwardly critical nature of the 1960s was still present in the 1970s. The Watergate scandal in 1974 under President Richard Nixon had allowed the masses more freedom to poke fun at higher authority. The jovial attitude was often seen on t-shirts, as people finally shed the fear of being targeted by national intelligence programs by the CIA (CHAOS) and FBI (COINTELPRO).<sup>[3]</sup> Their participation in the Me Generation was also on full display through their clothing.

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#### Appendix A21: Section from "The 1970s" page, highlighting a slogan tee from Vintage T-Shirts

T-shirts could now announce to the world the wearer's perceived intelligence and self-confidence. It was not unusual to see someone wearing an ego inflating or government degrading apparel. By the late 1970s, these t-shirts were easily and widely available. A decade prior, they would only be available for purchase on the streets of the Bay area or hand made. Consumers could now enter could enter a big brand store to find ready-made revolutionary tees, specially targeted to them by marketing agencies on Madison Avenue.<sup>[4]</sup>



Environmental t-shirts, 1970s. The environmental movement gained traction in the 1970s, with the creation of Earth Day in 1970 and the explosion on 3 Mile Island in Pennsylvania, March 1979.

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#### Appendix A22: Section from "The 1970s" page, highlighting three environmental activist tees from Vintage T-Shirts

December 15, 1971, John and Yoko are photographed in Toronto holding a poster reading "WAR IS OVER! If you want it" as part of their ongoing Campaign for Peace. The message was seen worldwide, with a large billboards and newspaper ads in eleven major cities.

In Toronto, over thirty billboards were plastered throughout the downtown core. In New York City, a billboard was strategically placed across from the Marines recruitment centre in Times Square. The format, a stark white background with bold black lettering would serve as a blueprint for protest t-shirts to come.

The t-shirts Yoko sold at her art shows, asking the viewer to question anything and everything, mirrored this form and added a black background and white text variation.

[7] Much like the billboards and ads, the t-shirt would spread messaging far and wide, disseminated onto an individual level. John and Yoko were not the only revolutionary pair to bring the t-shirt to new heights, as it was a role that was also filled across the ocean in the UK.

[8]

"WAR IS OVER! If you want it" billboard in Times Square, New York City 1971.

Yoko Ono t-shirts, 1970s.

Appendix A23: Section from "The 1970s" page, highlighting the influence of John Lennon and Yoko Ono. Three T-shirts from Ripped: T-Shirts from the Underground, two images and a YouTube video as the background

In London, England, the punk movement was carrying the counterculture of the late 1970s. Similar to the Haight-Ashbury counterculture, punk was only active for a few years. From 1975 to 1978, UK punks were driven by an anxiety about the state of the country. Unemployment hit an all-time high in 1977, amid the worst recession the UK had seen since the 1930s.[9] The punk movement was highly visual, the punk DIY style incorporated everyday objects as apparel.

Hair was brightly coloured and spiked, makeup smudged and bodies modified through piercings and tattoos.

While on the surface it appeared to be pure mayhem, it was a scene that was carefully crafted by the architect of punk, Malcolm McLaren. If McLaren was the architect of punk, then his creative partner Vivienne Westwood was the engineer.

Images: Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood in their shop, Seditonaries, late 1970s.

From within the four walls of their shop at 430 King's Road in London,[10] McLaren conceived of ways to reinvent the t-shirt and Westwood executed his vision. McLaren and Westwood went beyond pushing the envelope, they tore it apart and then stuck it back together. Shirts were soon ripped and fastened with safety pins, adorned with silver studs, and zippers were sown onto women's shirts over the breast to expose the nipple at the wearers' behest.[11][12]

Appendix A24: Section from "The 1970s" page, two images highlighting the work of Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren



*Cambridge Rapist printed shirt, Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren, 1977-1978*

The pair's t-shirt designs were nothing less than shocking. Using a children's screen-printing set, the pair exploiting the fear surrounding the at large Cambridge Rapist, printed images of nude adolescent boys and nude cowboys. McLaren, having been introduced to the Marxist group Situationist International in his Croyden Art College days, began envisioning Marxist leaders printed onto shirts.<sup>[13]</sup> The resulting Marxist-anarchist shirt presents philosopher Karl Marx juxtaposed with anarchist slogans. For London in the 1970s, it was all far too egregious, and the pair were arrested for 'exposing the public view to an indecent exhibition' and fined fifty pounds.<sup>[14]</sup>



*Destroy printed shirt, Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren, 1977*

<sup>[15]</sup>

*Appendix A25: Section from "The 1970s" page, highlighting two T-shirts in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum*



*The Sex Pistols performing in Norway, 1977. Bassist Johnny Rotten is seen wearing the Cambridge Rapist t-shirt.*

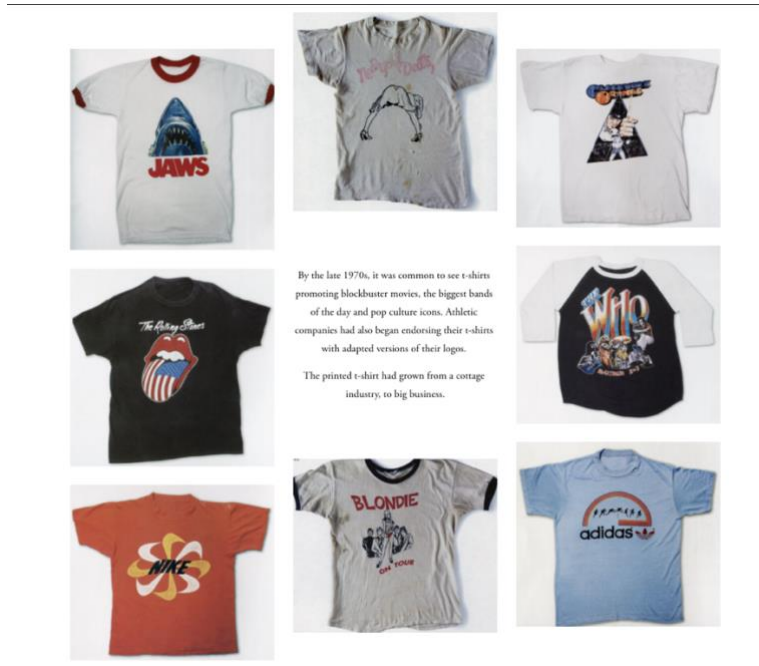
The pair also worked closely with artist Jamie Reid to create the signature punk cut-and-paste style as merchandise for The Sex Pistols. As manager for the band, McLaren could evolve the punk style with more anti-authoritarian undertones to evoke stronger reactions.

Back in the United States, the New York Dolls, the Dead Kennedys and Blondie carried the punk torch from New York City, meeting and playing with UK punk icons frequently. The American punk era would evolve into New Wave, a more glam and commercially friendly variant.

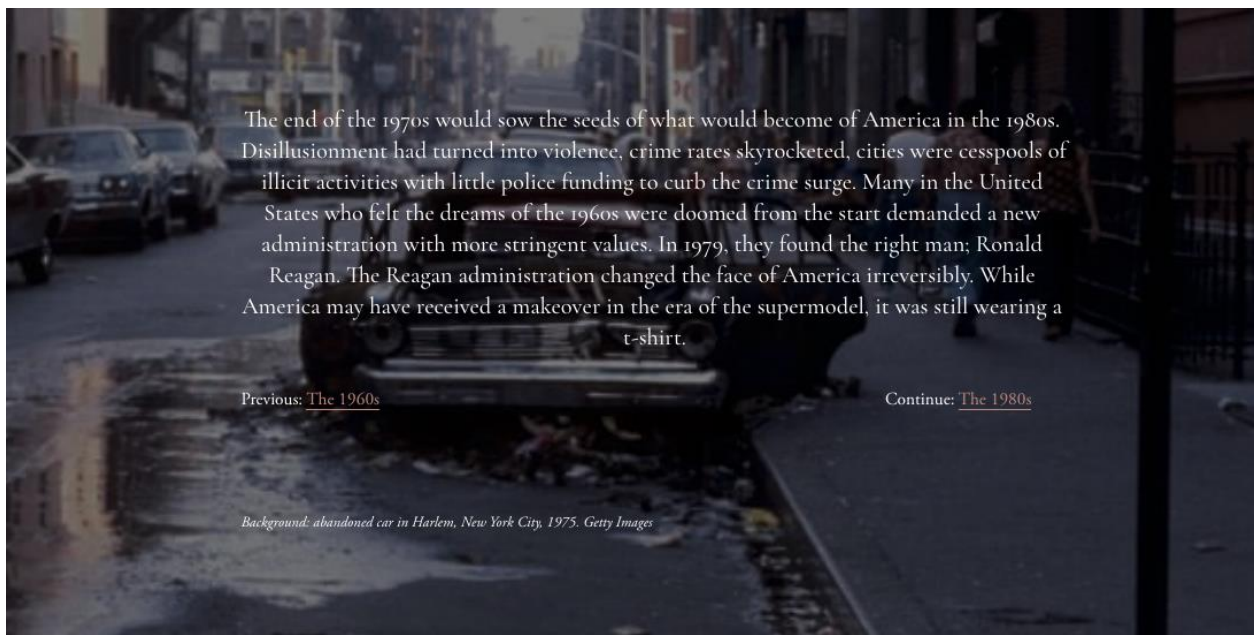


*The Sex Pistols 'Anarchy in the UK' t-shirt in the signature cut-and-paste style, Jamie Reid, 1976*

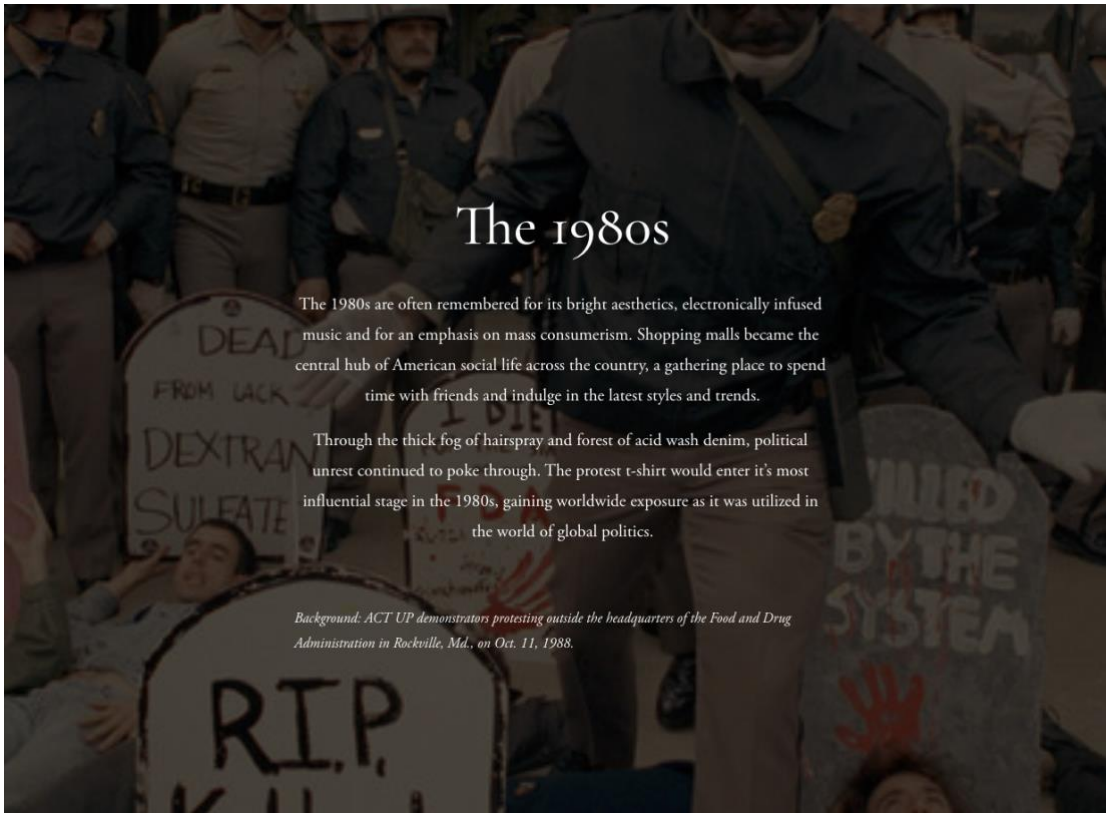
*Appendix A26: Section from "The 1970s" page, highlighting The Sex Pistols, including a Jamie Reid T-shirt from the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum*



*Appendix A27: Section of "The 1970s" page, using eight T-shirts from Vintage T-Shirts and Ripped: Shirts from the Underground to surround the text*



*Appendix A28: Concluding section of "The 1970s" page*



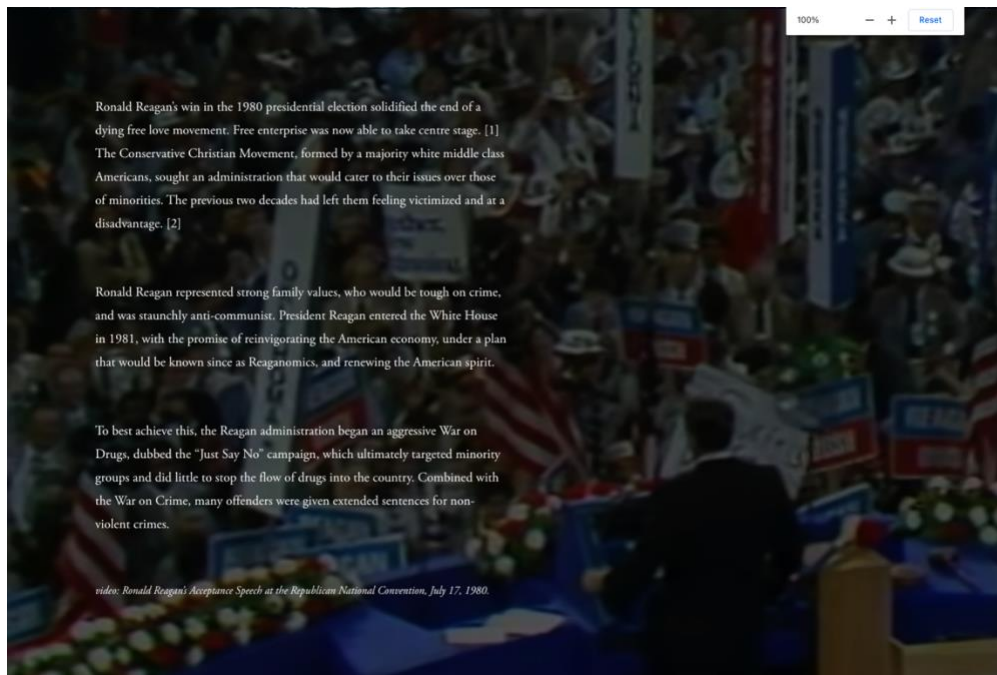
# The 1980s

The 1980s are often remembered for its bright aesthetics, electronically infused music and for an emphasis on mass consumerism. Shopping malls became the central hub of American social life across the country, a gathering place to spend time with friends and indulge in the latest styles and trends.

Through the thick fog of hairspray and forest of acid wash denim, political unrest continued to poke through. The protest t-shirt would enter its most influential stage in the 1980s, gaining worldwide exposure as it was utilized in the world of global politics.

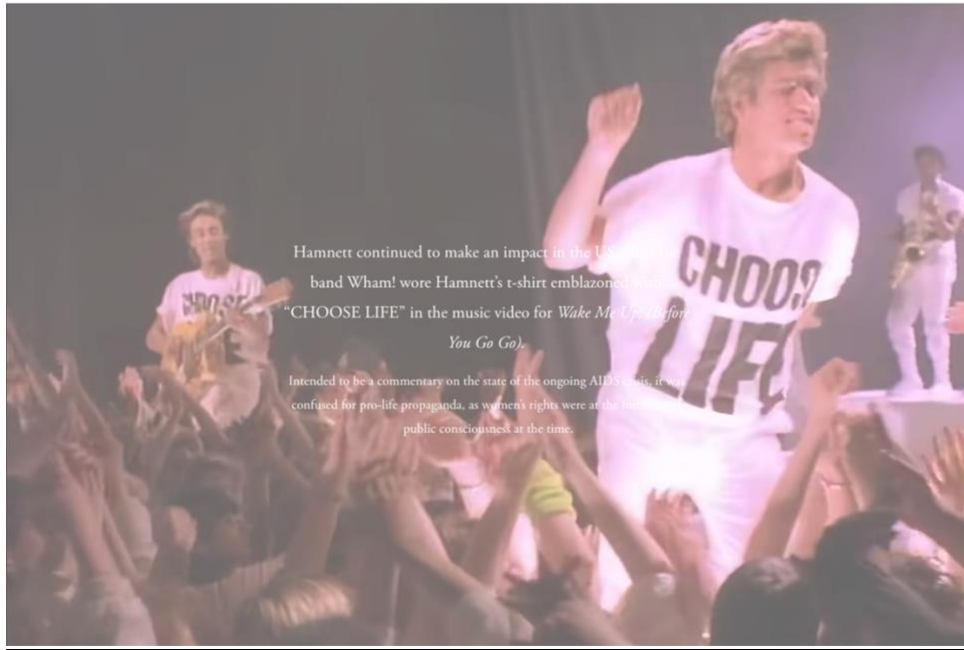
*Background: ACT UP demonstrators protesting outside the headquarters of the Food and Drug Administration in Rockville, Md., on Oct. 11, 1988.*

Appendix A29: Introductory section of the "1980s" page



Appendix A30: Section of "The 1980s" page, using a YouTube video uploaded by the Reagan Library of Ronald Reagan at the RNC, 1980, as the background





Appendix A31: Section of "The 1980s" page, using the music video of Whams! Wake Me Up (Before You Go-Go) from YouTube as the background



Appendix A32: Section from "The 1980s" page, highlighting two T-shirts from wearinggayhistory.com



The full power of ACT UP was on display on December 10, 1989, when the group confronted the archdiocese and Cardinal John O'Connor. Cardinal O'Connor had employed extensive campaigns to spread misinformation about the spread of AIDS, stating that safe sex would not protect against the virus, and lobbied to cancel programs that handed out condoms in high schools. [11]The demonstration resulted in the arrest of 111 protestors and nationwide attention. Ultimately, the efforts of ACT UP led to the Food and Drug Administration shortening drug trial periods to two years, making treatment available sooner and saving lives.

Image: Article from The New York Times covering the Stop the Church protest. Published December 11, 1989

Appendix A33: Section from "The 1980s" page, using an article from the New York Times covering the Stop The Church march in NYC, 1989



The 1980s casted a shadow over the efforts of the previous two decades with a conservative emphasis on reinstating the status quo. Individual material wealth took precedence over civil liberties. The effects of Reaganomics and globalization would become the top of the public agenda in the 1990s, and the political t-shirt would be forced to adopt a more subversive form to spread its message.

Image: Slogan t-shirt, 1989

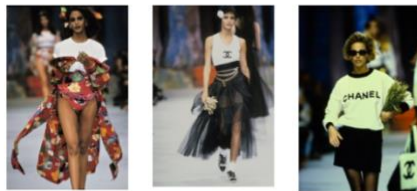
Appendix A34: Concluding section of "The 1980s" page, highlighting a slogan T-shirt from Vintage T-Shirts

## The 1990s

Reaganomics and the 1980s changed the way mass markets operated domestically and globally. T-shirts, while still important symbols of personal beliefs, had lost its connection to radical theatrics. A minority few stayed true to the origins of the protest t-shirt of the late 1960s, but branding became more prominent as the apparel industry continued to grow. What a t-shirt said or projected about the wearer was more reliant on a logo than any cause it could promote.[1] While many consumers could promote artists and current events through the medium, t-shirts failed to make the political statement they would have a decade prior. Ultimately, the most notable garment of the decade was a blue dress, not a cheap t-shirt.

(Content warning for graphic images)

### Appendix A35: Introductory section to "The 1990s" page



Images from the Chanel Spring 1992 Ready-to-Wear show, featuring t-shirts and apparel printed with the brand logo.

Branding on t-shirts was not a new concept, the relationship between the two had been formed by California surfer shops in the late 1940s. Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s branding became increasingly important in streetwear.

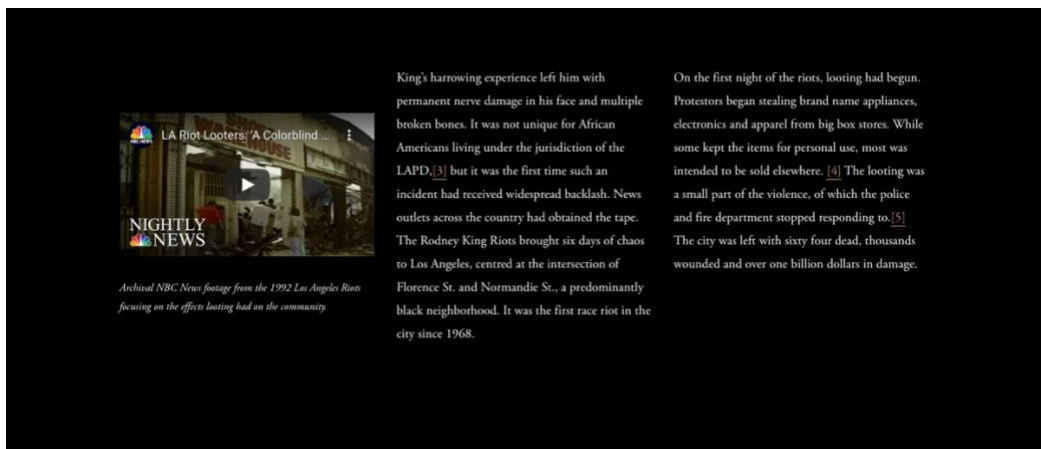
The 1990s ushered in a new phase of this relationship when t-shirts made a debut on the runway with the Chanel Spring/Summer 1992 collection.[2] High end brands now adopted tees to promote their image. For the average person, a plain t-shirt with a printed logo was the cheapest item available from a luxury brand. It bridged the gap between those at the edge of access and those with excess. For those still unable to afford the cheapest items from a brand, issues of classism and racism emerged.

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### Appendix A36: Section from "The 1990s" page, highlighting the branding of garments from the Chanel Spring/Summer 1992 collection



Appendix A37: Section from "The 1990s" page, showing a still from the George Holliday video and using an image of Los Angeles during the riots as the background



Appendix A38: Section from "The 1990s" page, using NBC archival footage uploaded to YouTube to show the aftermath of the LA riots



Appendix A39: Section from "The 1990s" page, three images showing the Rodney King riots

The 1990s were defined by the intersection of technology, media and personal expression. Protest music permeated the private sphere in new ways, and was often subliminal. Dissent had found a safe haven in the hyperspace on Music Television (MTV).

Originally entering the air waves in 1981, MTV was an immediate success. By the mid-1990s, MTV had changed some of its programming to reality tv, but music videos remained central to the MTV identity. Music videos were no longer consisted of filmed performances, but full scale productions with sets, costumes, story lines and effects.<sup>[6]</sup> The two most prevalent genres of the decade, hip hop and grunge, utilized MTV to spread their dissenting message.




(above) MTV Logo t-shirt, c. 1985. The MTV logo became a quickly popular image on t-shirts when it entered the airwaves in 1981

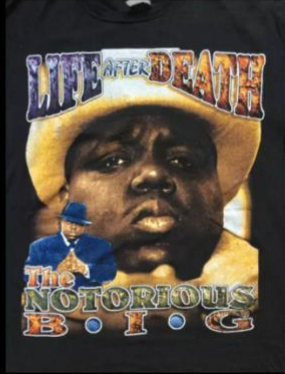
(below) RUN DMC t-shirts, c.1990. American rap group RUN DMC were the first black rap artists to appear on MTV in 1984.



Appendix A40: Section from "The 1990s", highlighting an Music TeleVision T-shirt and two RUN DMC T-shirts from Vintage T-Shirts



*Tupac Shakur T-shirt, front and back, 1990s.*

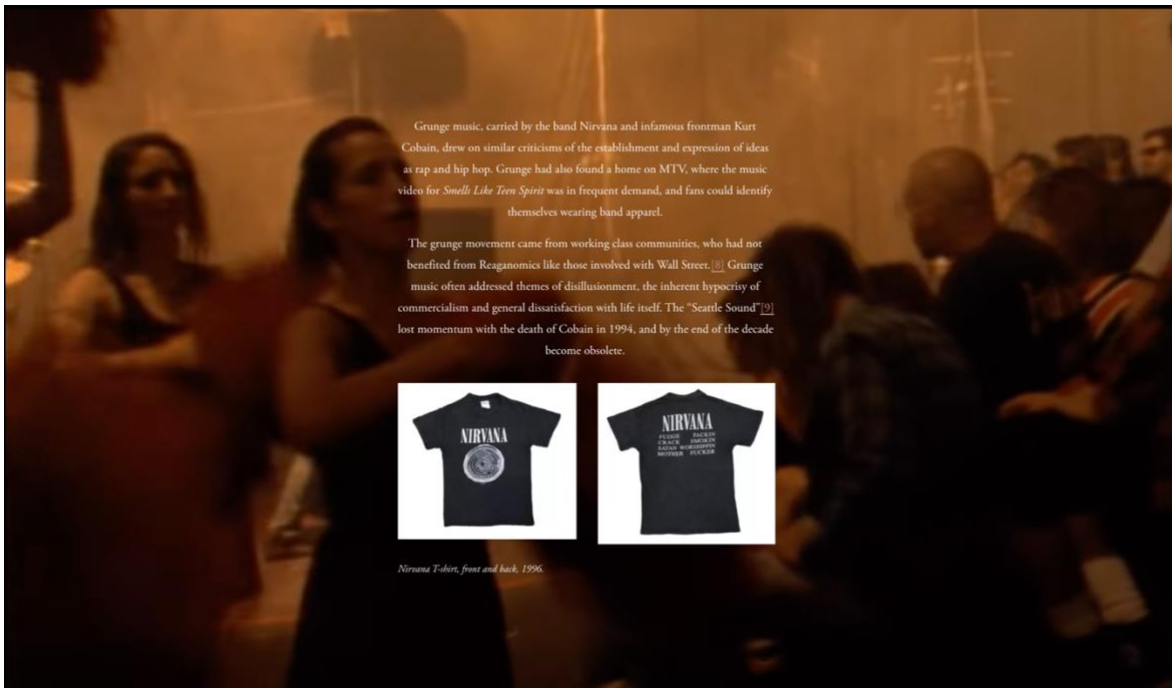


*Commemorative T-Shirt for The Notorious B.I.G following his death in 1997. Late 1990s.*

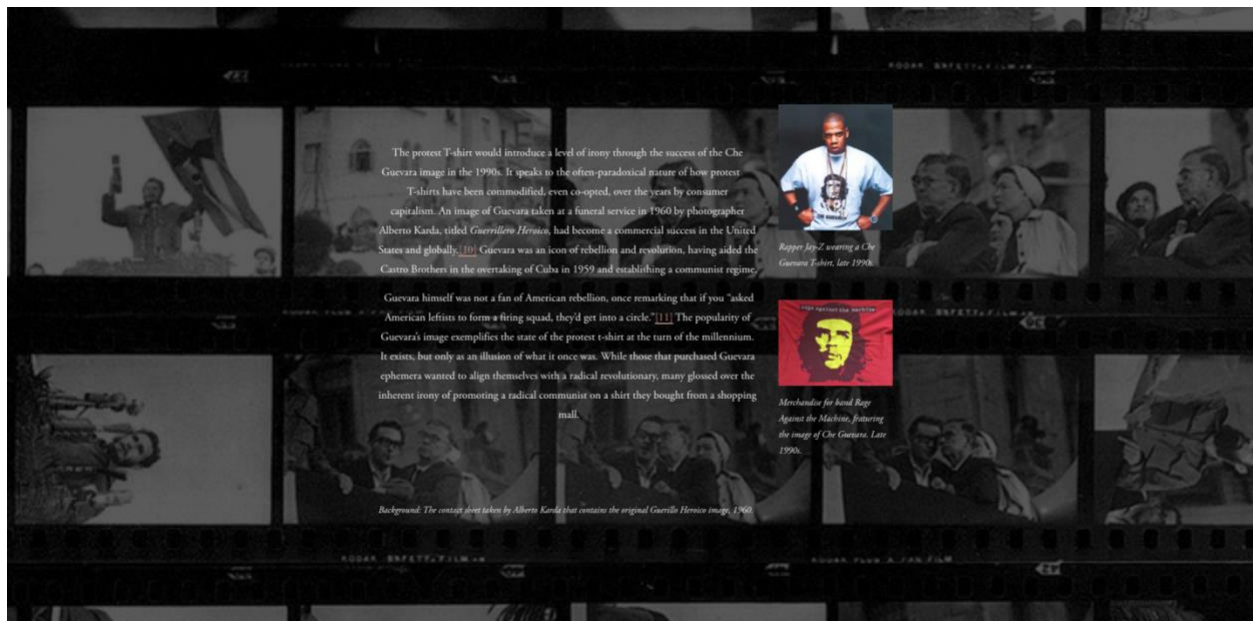
Race relations in the United States would not improve after the Los Angeles King riots. The policies in Reagan's War Against Crime incarcerated millions and led to immense stress on the prison system. In response to the overflow of inmates, the Clinton administration reallocated funds from public housing to reinforce existing prisons and build new ones.<sup>[7]</sup> President Clinton was constantly engulfed by personal scandals, most infamously with White House intern Monica Lewinsky in 1997, and perhaps too busy to adequately resolve the issue.

Hip hop and rap, an underground phenomena that had been developing for several generations, gave a marginalized community of African Americans an outlet to vent frustrations with the system. The Notorious B.I.G, Wu-Tang Clan, NWA and Tupac Shakur dominated the airwaves with messaging about the experiences of the underprivileged, conditions that had not improved for decades. Those that identified with these messages could wear t-shirts promoting their favourite artists.

Appendix A41: Section from "The 1990s", highlighting two hip-hop t-shirts from the 1990s



Appendix A42: Section from "The 1990s" page, using Nirvana's *Smells Like Teen Spirit* video from YouTube as the background and band merchandise



Appendix A43: Section from "The 1990s" page, highlighting the Che Guevara T-shirt, including a scan of the original film role used by Albert Korda that captured *Guerillero Heroico* as the background

In the decades that followed the 1990s, political and protest t-shirts continued to speak to the masses. The rise and proliferation of the internet into everyday life has given the protest t-shirt a shorter shelf life. A t-shirt calling for peace and love in the 1960s that could speak to all eras has been replaced by the hyper specific identification of current issues.

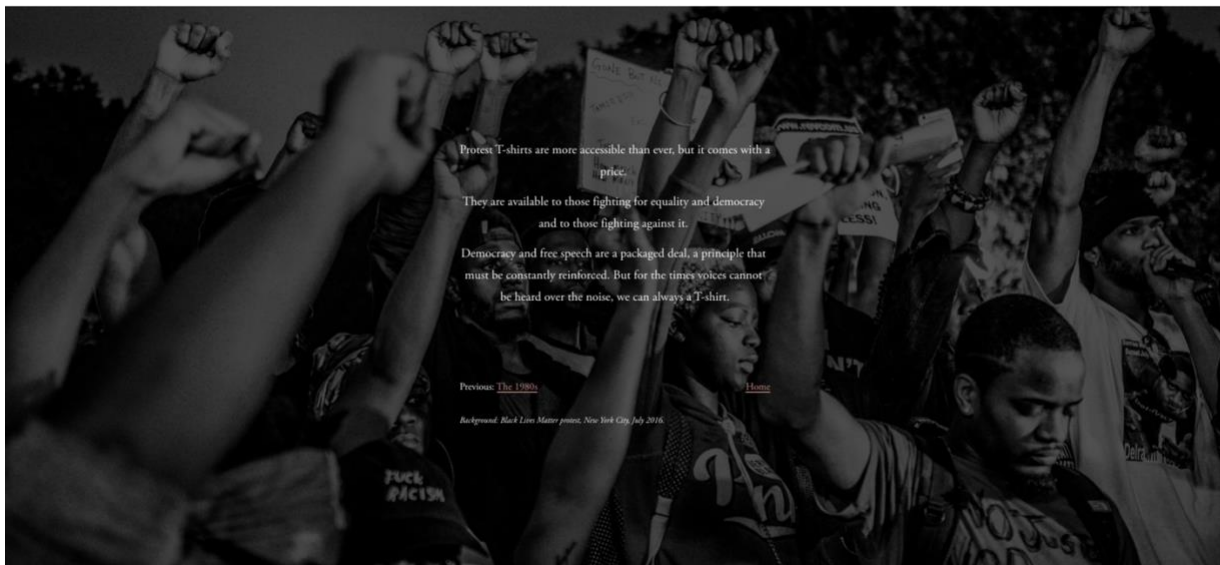


In more recent memory the Black Lives Matter protests of summer 2020, in response to the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd at the hands of the authorities, sparked the production of several t-shirts.



On January 6, 2021, right wing radicals stormed the US Capitol Building in Washington D.C in an attempt to thwart

*Appendix A44: Section from "The 1990s" page, juxtaposing Breonna Taylor protest T-shirt against those worn at the Capitol Riots in January, 2021*



*Appendix A45: Concluding section of "The 1990s" page, using an image from the Black Lives Matter protest in 2016*