



Dress Codes: Meanings And Messages In American Culture

Ruth Rubinstein

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Rich with illustrations, *Dress Codes* systematically analyzes the meaning and relevance of clothing in American culture. Presented here in one book for the first time are theories of clothing and an up-to-date analysis of images of power and authority, gender, seduction (the sexy look, the alluring look, the glamorous look, the vulnerable look), wealth and beauty, youth and health, and leisure and political hierarchy. Taken together, the chapters offer to the student and the general reader a complete “semiotics of clothing” in a form that is highly readable, very entertaining, and thoroughly informative. The illustrations provide fascinating glimpses into the history of American fashion and clothing—along with their antecedents in Europe—as well as a fine collection of images from the more familiar world of contemporary America. After ten years of teaching and research, Rubinstein has identified six distinct categories of dress in American society, upon which *Dress Codes* is based. “Clothing signs” have only one meaning and are instituted by those in authority as required attire (police uniform, nun’s attire); “clothing symbols,” which have several meanings and involve individual choice (designer clothing, jewelry); “clothing tie-signs,” which are specific types of clothing that indicate membership in a community outside mainstream culture (Hasidic, Amish, or Hare Krishna attire); “clothing tie-symbols,” which act as a means of broader social affiliation emanating especially from fears, hopes, and dreams (Save the Earth clothing, Pro-Choice T-shirts, Madonna’s crosses); “personal dress,” which refers to the “I” component we bring in when dressing the public self (bowtie, dramatic, or artistic attire); and “contemporary fashion,” which is the interaction between political and economic events and consumer sentiments, involving public memory. Written in a lively and entertaining style, *Dress Codes* will fascinate both general readers and students interested in the history of fashion and costume, fashion design, human development, and gender studies.

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