

ELIZABETH KECKLY: FASHIONING A PUBLIC IMAGE

TEACHER TOOL 3

Slave Clothing Vs. Clothing of the Elite

	<u>Slave Clothing</u>	<u>Clothing of Elite</u>
<u>Fabrics</u>	homespun coarse cloth: plain cottons or poorer quality wools or from osnaburg (a coarse, inexpensive linen), fustian (a cotton and linen mix) or linsey-woolsey (a blend of wool and flax),	fine, soft cloth: chintz, superfine wools
<u>Appearance</u>	loose fitting sometimes soiled, worn,	close fitting, clean, brushed
<u>Men's Dress</u>	loose shirts short jackets trousers or breeches (of leather or osnaburg)	tailored shirts stylish coats velvet breeches
<u>Women's Dress</u>	coarse dresses and aprons	silk gowns and lace trim

Diversity within Slave Attire

Plantation slaves were given a small amount of coarse fabric, generally spun on the plantation, from which to sew clothing. In contrast, wealthy women could pay for a lot of fine fabrics from which they had seamstresses make fancy dresses. Because most enslaved people had so few clothes—say, one outfit for warmer months and one for colder months—they were often identified by the clothing they wore. House slaves were generally better attired than field slaves and often received hand-me-downs from their masters. Those who worked in cities were also generally better dressed than those who worked in the fields. The higher an enslaved person's status, the better they were able to dress. A lack of economic resources meant it was almost impossible to "follow" mainstream fashion trends, which required time, freedom, and money. Yet enslaved men and women often found ways to be fashionable and to "express" themselves, their African culture, as well as their resistance to dominant European culture, and their enslavement through appearance and dress.

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