

## **The Emergence Of Kente Cloth**

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In today's society, many people do not know how their favorite shirt is made. Many people don't know that it takes time to piece together their favorite cotton blend t-shirt through the beauty of sewing and hemming. Meticulous stitches with every line that takes time and expertise. Moreover, this causes the appreciation of hand-sewn clothing to take a shine in our everyday lives because, without it, many of our favorite pieces of clothing wouldn't be here. People want to consume clothing right away and don't want to wait for a designer to custom sew a piece that could take some time. A piece of clothing that is handmade every time is kente cloth.

Kente cloth originates from the Asante people of Ghana, West Africa. According to Boddy-Evans " Kente cloth is made from thin strips about four cm thick woven together on narrow looms. The strips are interlaced to form a fabric which is usually worn wrapped around the shoulders and waist like a toga" (2018). The Asante people have a legend that explains how the Kente cloth gained its iconic design. According to Micots, two young men—Ota Karaban and his friend Kwaku Ameyaw—learned the art of weaving by observing a spider weaving its web. One night, the two went out into the forest to check their traps, and they were amazed by a beautiful spider's web whose many unique designs sparkled in the moonlight. The spider, named Ananse, offered to show the men how to weave such designs in exchange for a few favors. After completing the favors and learning how to weave the designs with a single thread, the men returned home to Bonwire, and their discovery was soon reported to Asantehene Osei Tutu, first ruler of the Asante kingdom. The Asante Hene adopted their creation, named kente, as a royal cloth reserved for special occasions, and Bonwire became the leading kente weaving center for the Asante Hene and his court (2017).

Moreover, this historical background allows us to have a better understanding of the design of Kente. It shows us that there is a meaning behind how each line is placed where its placed by the seamstress. Kente in Ghana is usually associated with royalty. It

is reserved for special and sacred functions that are held by Asante royalty. It also displays social status, wealth, and sophistication of culture.

How is Kente woven? It is handwoven on two-panel frames, one is called the warp and the other is called the weft. The warp is where the threads run vertically on parallel threads. The weft runs horizontally on a horizontal loom constructed with wood, consisting of two, four, or six loops for holding the thread. Creating the kente cloth is not easy to make they require you to use your feet to weave the thread together, the name of these foot pedals are treadles. Furthermore, having so much time being put into just weaving the cloth shows us how significant handmade products are valued in today's society.

The Kente cloth made its way to the United States in 1958 by the prime minister of independent Ghana. This was the birth of how Kente became so common in fashion and even academia. Kente has a huge social life within the United States, we see Kente on social media, being sold in Harlem by vendors, or being worn by a native Ghanaian who may be going to a special function. The social life of kente has been around since the nineties through black sitcoms like Martin and Living Single. This started a conversation for African Americans who don't have deep roots with Africa, as in an immediate family member who is from Ghana or African state to have that cultural connection directly. The Kente allowed for "Americanized" African Americans to have a sense of placement in society.

Kente cloth creates identities for African Americans because when you are growing up in New York, America's melting pot you see the different amount of people expressing themselves through cultural events like Muslims dressing up in their colorful dressed for Eid. You feel disconnected from your culture because you didn't grow up around with cultural traditions that distinct you on a deeper level. Clothing is usually only thought of as a piece of clothing that we put on to protect us from the elements but clothing is more than that. Clothing becomes a part of who we are, it gives people a glimpse of who you are because they see what interests you through your clothing. Furthermore, Kente is a piece of clothing that doesn't have a gender-specific purpose.

The Kente is worn the same way by men and women in Ghana. The men wrap it around their waist like a skirt or wrapped completely around their body like a toga. The women wear it the same only difference is when worn like a skirt they add a top whereas the men usually don't. This is a refreshing concept in a society that always wants to put people in gender barriers with clothing. As stated by Delaney "Clothes do not merely protect us from the elements, for they also express cultural meanings and identities and serve as markers of status, age, and gender as well as occupation, activity, degree of formality, and a host of other things. Like other nonverbal signs, these markers not only distinguish individuals and groups from each other but also are a means for "placing" people in their social context" (295).

Moreover, to have a piece of clothing that helps you identify closer to your ethnic roots is important because it helps you identify with social groups which ultimately makes you feel in place society. Kente has a huge influence on the Black diaspora in academia because its significant coloring used on sashes at graduation allows students to have that empowerment of completing college, something that their parents or ancestors could have done in the past. Kente is majorly used in academia because of this nature. The bright yellow signifying wealth and royalty, green signifying growth and energy, and the red signifying passion. Furthermore, to have these colors displayed for African Americans lets them feel the success they are achieving for themselves and the people around them. As stated by Padilioni " When Black students wear Kente stoles as a sign of their successful matriculation through higher education, they transform their bodies into living, breathing proverbs. Whether graduating from an HBCU or a PWI, each journey to commencement courses down a road hewn open through the labors of Charlotte Forten Grimké, W. E. B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, and the entire cloud of Diasporic witnesses who birthed Black Studies out of their "(at least) "500-year conversation, in myriad languages and cultural expressions...over the meaning of loss and displacement" (2017). To be able to have this form of expression through the kente cloth allows them to understand how important this intricate piece of cloth is.

Overall, Kente is the most seen piece of cloth in today's society apart from the dashiki. This clothing gives people a voice that they wouldn't have had before because it signifies a part of themselves that expresses where they came from. I learned that each color on the kente has a specific meaning, I always thought that the colors used were just something randomly picked to make it more appealing to the eye. Moreover, it has changed my thinking of the item because it showed me that something so simple looking is this difficult intricate piece of cloth that takes pronounced skill to make. The amount of time it takes to make a few square feet of this cloth also changed my thinking because we see it so much that I never really thought it takes so much time to produce. I enjoyed researching this because I am apart of the people who don't have a direct connection to my culture so to have this clothing that goes back to a place that is connected in one way or another, helps me become more socially connected with the people who live in and have the first-hand experience with that culture. The Kente is an amazing piece of clothing that is valued and used by many people in our society that it should be around for decades and decades.

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