

White Tee

Numan Khalid

How did the T-shirt take over everyone's wardrobes and become an indispensable feature that is necessary to go with our jeans? How might have a common white T-shirt evolved over a period? A common piece of thread that is widely worn by many of us and has built a social relationship around the world. The social relationship consists of, how the plain white tee has elevated in the fashion world and how it is often considered a luxury piece of clothing. Before digging into the social relationship, understanding and examining the beginnings of it is necessary.

A T-shirt, or tee-shirt, is a style of fabric shirt named after the T-shape of its body and sleeves. Traditionally, it has short sleeves and a round neckline, known as a crew neck, which lacks a collar. T-shirts are generally made of a stretchy, lightweight, and inexpensive fabric and are easy to clean. The T-shirt was first made its introduction as a uniform and later made it's a procession towards the general public. "The proliferation of the t-shirt is largely tied to its roots as uniform wear and made its first appearance as an undergarment for sailors. The earliest example of this style dates to the 18th century in the form of a long undershirt that tied between the legs, resembling a onesie. This design led to the creation of the one-piece union suit and two-piece wool underwear sets supplied to soldiers during the American Civil War; the U.S. Navy mandated a similar uniform to be worn as outerwear. Born out of the popularity of the tank-style swimsuit in the late 1800s, the undershirt became a form of male intimates that were acceptable to wear on their own in public, (Dates, 2020)." After World War 2 and the Great Depression, the T-shirt started making it way to the general public. Large companies like Hanes or Fruit of the Loom started producing massive amounts of T-shirts in high demand. Seemingly the iconic plain tee-shirt moved past its humble origins and became a fast fashion staple. "The basic tee, after all, is the simplest, easiest piece of clothing imaginable—its blank-page quality functions like a screen on which we project our current cultural preoccupations. A T-shirt can denote working-class status (if, for example, you're the Boss); symbolize rebellion (James Dean in Rebel Without a Cause), athleticism (just ask any sports figure from dancers to boxers and

everyone in between); accentuate sexiness (that cling!). And it's the most versatile piece imaginable too—the T-shirt can be worn anywhere, from the backwaters of New Orleans (Marlon Brando in *A Streetcar Named Desire*) to the red carpet, (Borrelli-Persson, 2015).” Moving forward it is important to understanding how the white tee took a twist and slowly set about being labeled as a luxury piece of cloth.

The white tee has a way of cultivating its status and being displayed as an iconic piece of cloth. The normal price of a Hanes white T-shirt cost \$1.69 each. Though, one might wonder if a cheap \$1.69 T-shirt is better or a \$500 tee. "I like the idea of something that looks so plain and utilitarian, but when I'm wearing it, I feel special," said Liam Goslett, a 25-year-old photographer who recently spent \$415 at Mr. Porter on a style from the Elder Statesman, a brand he has done some work for in the past. Mr. Goslett's rationale: He wears a T-shirt almost every day. Why shouldn't he invest accordingly? (Gallagher, 2017).” In these cases, luxury brands might have the ability to offer the consumer high quality fabric and a much suitable fit. The social aspect of the white shirt has taught me that a plain cloth on our body could appeal as an iconic label. Big fashion icons like Kanye West have normalized the \$200 price tag for a shirt that his brand called “Yeezy,” that is currently being sold. Ultimately, it is up to the consumer on purchasing a plain white T-shirt for a horrendous amount. The cultural ascendancy of the white T-Shirt was unstoppable. The symbol of youth, rejection of stuffy conformity, and working-class vigor were rapidly adopted by the wealthier classes. Soon even the President could be photographed wearing underwear as outerwear. “The definition of fashion that I have outlined is concerned specifically with fashion from the perspective of what people wear and, as such, forms an orientation to fashion as a form of “Ordinary consumption” (Grow and Warde 2001) rather than as a spectacular form of differentiation. (Woodward, 2012).” The white tee can be a great example in this instance. Fashion has passed through many cultural shifts and movements throughout history, yet the plain T-shirt as not lost the value of it in the fashion industry.

In conclusion, upon conducting this research I discovered how the white tee is mainstream and universal. It can be worn anywhere and everywhere by men and women of all ages, from all walks of life. Now it is worn at work, at home, at the gym, at weddings, on the catwalks, and underneath tuxedos at film premieres. The American

culture appreciates the white-shirt and accepts it as an accessory that is mandatory in our closets. The importance of this object can show us how a cultural clothing item can be evolved and widely taken on across the world. Nonetheless, I wonder if the white tee will ever be cancelled as an essential object in our society.

References

Borrelli-Persson, Laird. "From Marlon Brando to Kendall Jenner, 27 of the Best Classic White T-Shirts Ever," February 1, 2017. <https://www.vogue.com/article/best-classic-white-t-shirts-of-all-time>.

Dates, Britnie. "The History of the White T-Shirt." Heroine. heroine, April 10, 2020. <https://www.heroine.com/the-editorial/history-of-the-white-tee>.

Gallagher, Jacob. "Is a \$415 Men's T-Shirt Better Than a \$6 One?" The Wall Street Journal. Dow Jones & Company, May 28, 2017. <https://www.wsj.com/amp/articles/the-great-t-shirt-test-we-tried-on-50from-6-to-415-1495554711>.

Woodward, Sophie. "'Humble' Blue Jeans: Material Approaches To Understanding The Ordinary, Global, And The Personal," 2012.