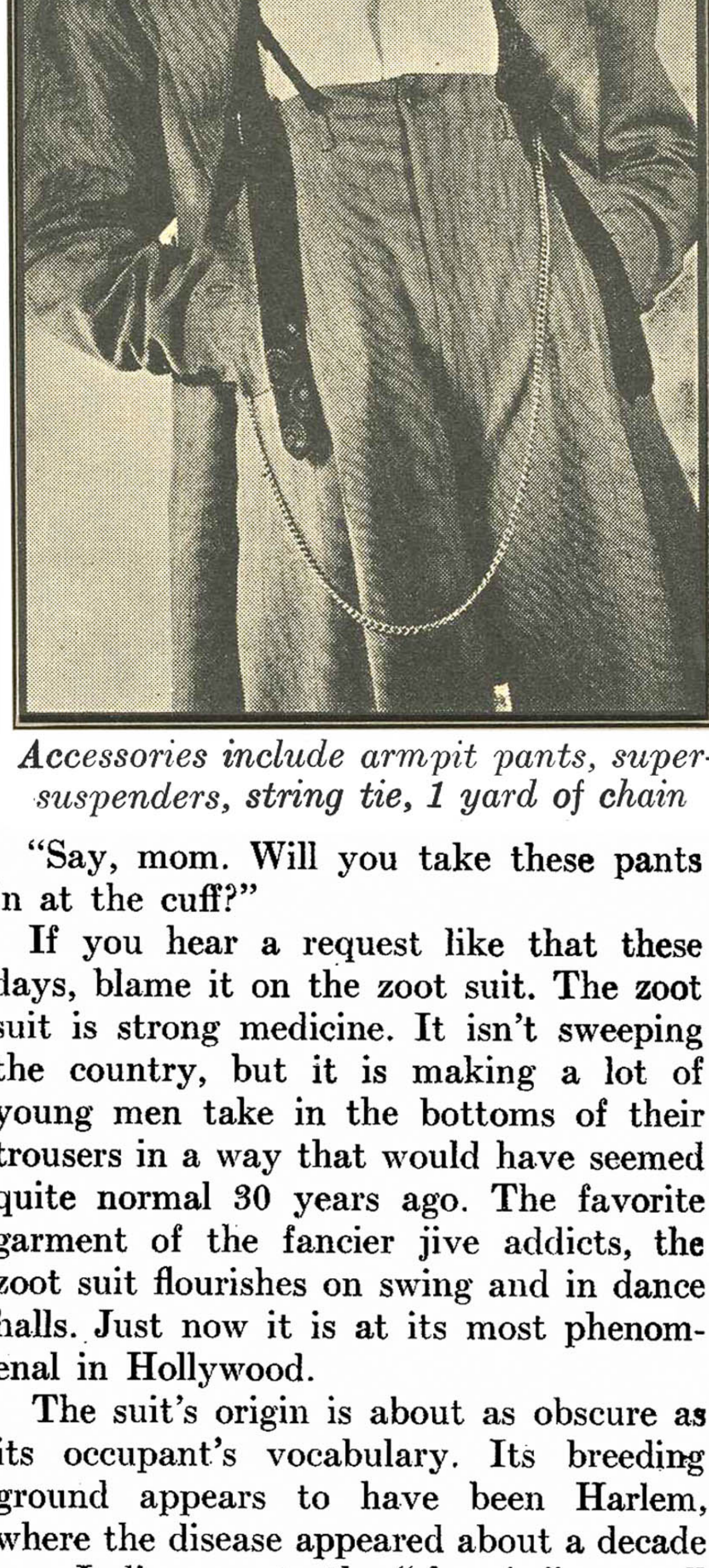
Newsweek

September 7, 1942: p. 48

DRAPE SHAPE



Accessories include armpit pants, super-suspenders, string tie, 1 yard of chain

"Say, mom. Will you take these pants in at the cuff?"

If you hear a request like that these days, blame it on the zoot suit. The zoot suit is strong medicine. It isn't sweeping the country, but it is making a lot of young men take in the bottoms of their trousers in a way that would have seemed quite normal 30 years ago. The favorite garment of the fancier jive addicts, the zoot suit flourishes on swing and in dance halls. Just now it is at its most phenomenal in Hollywood.

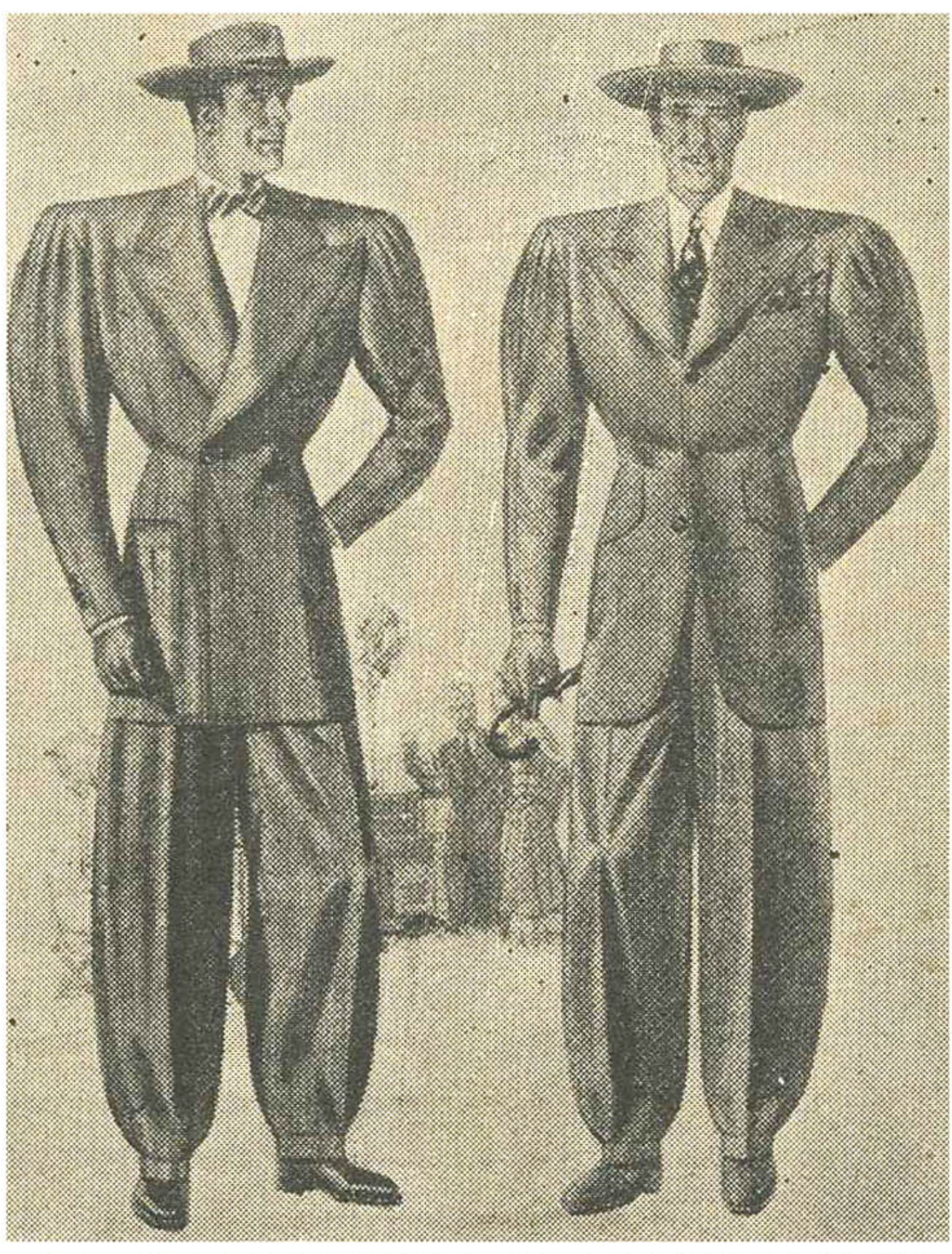
The suit's origin is about as obscure as its occupant's vocabulary. Its breeding ground appears to have been Harlem, where the disease appeared about a decade ago. Indigenous to the "sharpie," or swell dresser, it was known by that name until swing music came along. Then it became a "root suit." (Not to be confused with the "juke suit" the model for females.) When in late 1941 some Hollywood song writers produced the hit "A Zoot Suit," that name stuck.

To the initiated, the suit is best described by the song: "A zoot suit with a reat pleat with a drape shape and a stuff cuff."* Translated for the ignorant, this means a pair of trousers reaching nearly to the armpits, ballooning to about 32 inches in width at the knee, and tapering spectacularly into a cuff barely large enough to insert the foot. In action, the patient gives the effect of two up-ended baby blimps. As for the coat, it gets off to a flying start, with 3 to 6 inches of padding in the shoulders, then drips soggily almost to the knee.

This is a normal zoot, but for exotic detail the West Coasters have made the Harlem boys look like a bunch of undertakers. Hollywood superzooters sport pork-pie hats with monstrous brims, spaniel-eared suspenders, string ties, pearl buttons as big as silver dollars, and trouser

*Copyright 1942 by Greene-Revel, Inc., 580 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y. Used by permission of Greene-Revel, Inc.

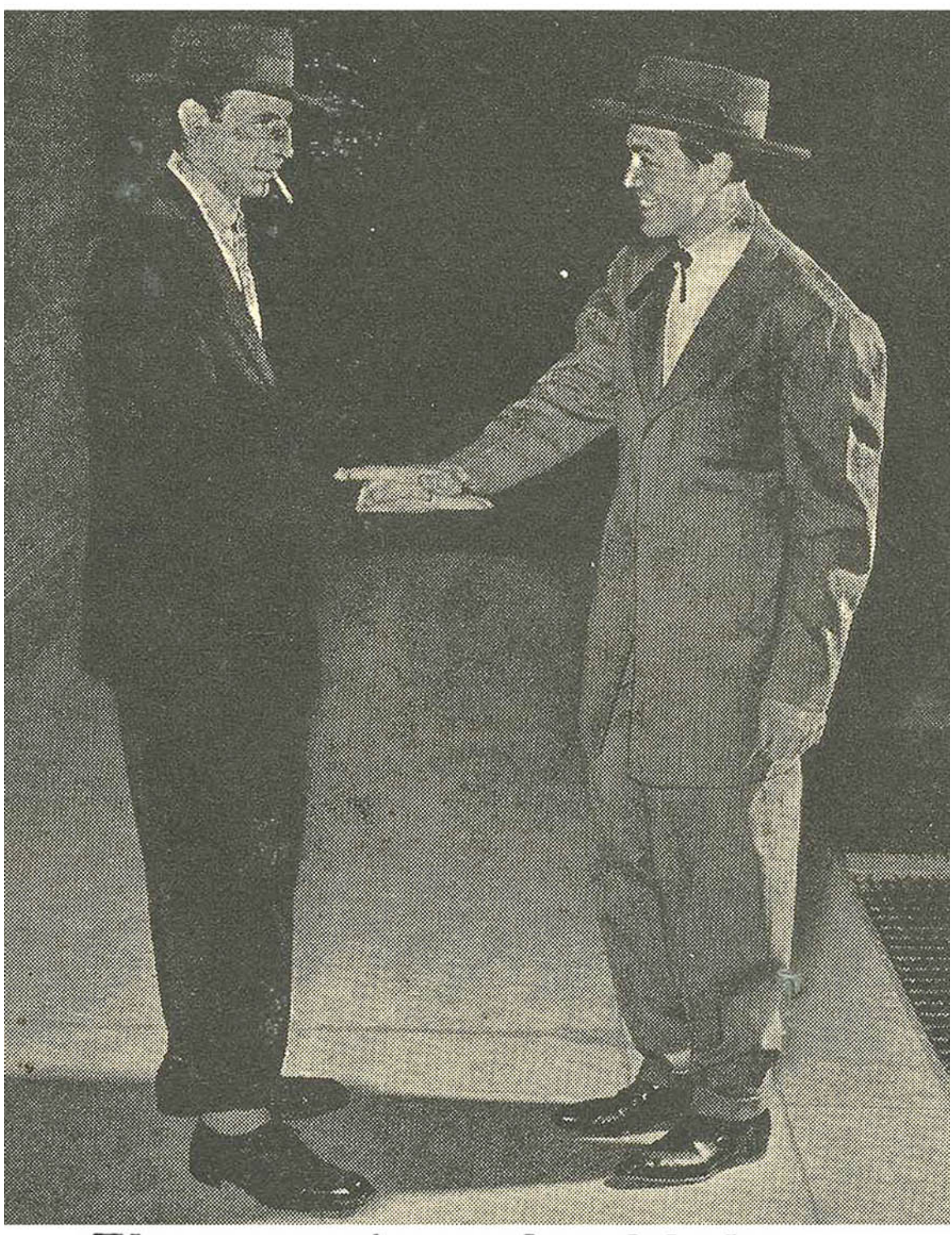
OldMagazineArticles.com



Designs for zoot at its zenith.

cuffs so tight they have to be zippered. But night life for these "characters" is precarious, as dance-hall proprietors prefer their clients "broad" (not sharp). If a zooter's coat reaches below his finger tips, the "heave-ho" (bouncer) performs. The idea is that, if the zoot suit is extreme, so is the character inside it.

Although the war hit swing addicts amidzoot—a WPB order last March limited men's clothing to slightly less material than the average prewar business suit—the jive world took it in stride.



The zooters' own handshake, palm to palm

OldMagazineArticles.com

Drape Shape

Harlem sartorial artists came up with a modified zoot, proclaiming its self-sacrificing patriotism in V-for-victory pockets, stitching, and pleats. And tailors prophesied last week that quality, not quantity, would set the style. Detail will be wackier, and colors louder. In other words, the zoot will still be solid, if you dig me.

Moderate zoots, with and without contrast

OldMagazineArticles.com