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Clothing and the War

People in the U. S. can still dress almost as they did in peacetime, but they pay more for what they get and quality has suffered.

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THE only people in the States who are really having a tough time getting clothing are much too young to give a damn about it. In children's and infants' wear there are shortages, but men and women have no trouble dressing themselves as adequately as they did before the war. In most lines, though, quality has gone down while prices have risen.

Men's underwear and pajamas are often hard to come by, chiefly because manufacturers are busy with Army-Navy orders for 60 million shirts and shorts. Women often can't get a house dress for less than \$5, and their gams don't look quite so good in cotton or rayon stockings as they did in silk and nylon.

When the war first started and manufacturers faced the problem of producing for a vastly increased Army and Navy as well as a civilian population, it was thought that all clothing might have to be rationed. Actually, however, only shoes have been put on the ration list.

Credit for staving off general rationing goes partly to cooperative, patriotic American sheep, which came through with bigger supplies of wool when all foreign sources were cut off, and partly to Government restrictions on manufacturers. Such cloth-consuming embellishments as pleats and cuffs on men's suits and extra width in women's garments were outlawed. Double-breasted men's suits were sold without vests; the tails on men's shirts became almost too short to tuck into a pair of pants; the length and width of women's skirts were decreased, and frills, by and large, were cut down.

The War Production Board, however, kept its hands off wedding gowns, maternity clothes and shrouds. These examples of nonintervention were approved in most native circles as a sign that our officials were still capable of sentiment.

The absence of cuffs and vests aside, pre-war styles in men's clothing are still obtainable. A man can get plaids, stripes, herringbones and all sorts of weaves in brown, blue, gray and all the various pastel shades. The best-selling suits and overcoats range from \$40 to \$50, which is a bit higher than the price of suits of comparable quality before the war. Both prices and shortages may increase during 1945 as a result of expected heavy Government orders for uniform cloth.

The greatest shortage right now is in cotton goods. Not long ago the Office of Civilian Requirements asked 4,499 housewives (nobody seems to know why the agency didn't query just one more housewife in order to get a nice, easy round number) what clothing was hardest to buy. The most consistent shortages were reported in house dresses, sheets, underwear—particularly children's—and diapers. A recent Government order for 90 million yards of herringbone twill can be cited as a probable cause of the scarcity. To help correct it, the Government is working on a plan under which a larger percentage of available cloth will be earmarked for production of scarce lower-cost items.

With women's underwear of the serviceable run-of-the-mill variety hard to get, the department stores report a run on black sheer negligee with a lot of lace. Most of these exciting articles seem to be bought by overseas veterans, the girls in the stores say. There's not too much even of the fancy stuff around, however, because the makers of sheer stuff and lace are turning out parachutes, camouflage nets and mosquito bars.

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The designers of women's outer garments are producing something they call the new "pencil silhouette" because they can't use ruffles, gathers and pleats. The "pencil silhouette" is supposed to show off a woman as she really is, and the name isn't well chosen because most women couldn't look anything like a pencil even if they were foolish enough to want to.

Women generally have had to make great changes in their dressing habits. In the first place, the shortage of rubber has raised hell with the girdle, or foundation garment. Most of the elastic is gone from the girdle, metal attachments have been removed and all but two stocking supports have been taken away. The girls who used to have trouble only in keeping their girdle down over their hips, shall we say, now also have trouble keeping their stockings up.

And the stockings are something the women—and the men—don't think much of. Nylons are just about nonexistent. Cotton is apt to make the legs look fat, and rayons fall down and bunch at the knees, the girls say.

Zippers are far from as common as they used to be, and women again have to contend with gaps and bulges between buttonholes.

The fur business is having the greatest season in its history, with more women than ever wearing fur coats. Rabbit is still the staple for low-priced coats selling for \$60 to \$90.

The shoe-rationing plan used to give everybody two pairs of leather shoes a year, but the Government, as the result of mounting Army-Navy purchases, has decided to lengthen the period in which a single pair must do. The exact length of time hasn't been announced yet, but it will probably be eight months instead of six.

The average man, who gives his shoes harder wear than women, has found it harder to make his quota last. To get more mileage out of each ration stamp, many men are buying a better and more expensive shoe than they used to.

Women have it easier because many types of nonrationed shoes have been developed for them. A new and profitable industry has sprung up for the production of this type of shoe. Soles are made of several substitutes—wood made by flexible crisscross cutting, chemically treated plywood, glycerin-saturated cotton, treated canvas and coiled rope soaked in reclaimed rubber.

Reclaimed rubber was used for a while as a substitute shoe sole for men, but housewives complained that it left black marks on the floor. Designers are now introducing wider toes in both men's and women's shoes, because war work has broadened the American foot.

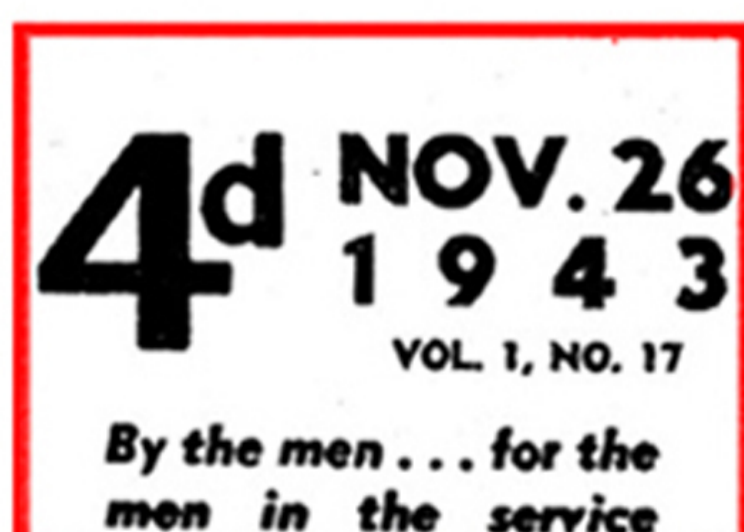
Children's shoes are scarce, because manufacturers can make more money with less trouble by producing shoes for adults. The small fry seem to be getting the worst of things.

Men have some trouble getting socks—or at least socks they want to wear. Hosiery knitters are working overtime filling military requirements, and the loud socks once popular with younger men are getting scarcer. (So, incidentally, are younger men in a position to wear loud socks.) The imported Argylls, fancy wool, French lisle and English rib socks have disappeared.

THE stylists, designers and manufacturers are staying up nights planning for the returning servicemen. Some believe that brown and blue clothes will be hard to sell after the war because no soldier will want anything brown and no sailor will want anything blue; others say these colors will be as popular as ever because they flatter most men.

Shirt-and-slack combinations, based on the Army's summer uniform, are becoming well liked for civilian wear, and the Army's new battle jacket, modeled after the British battle dress, has been copied for civilian sports jackets.

The hat makers hope the Army and Navy will have done away with their biggest problem—the habit young men used to have of going bare-headed. They think that after several years in organizations where hats are compulsory, a man will bring the headgear habit back to civilian life.



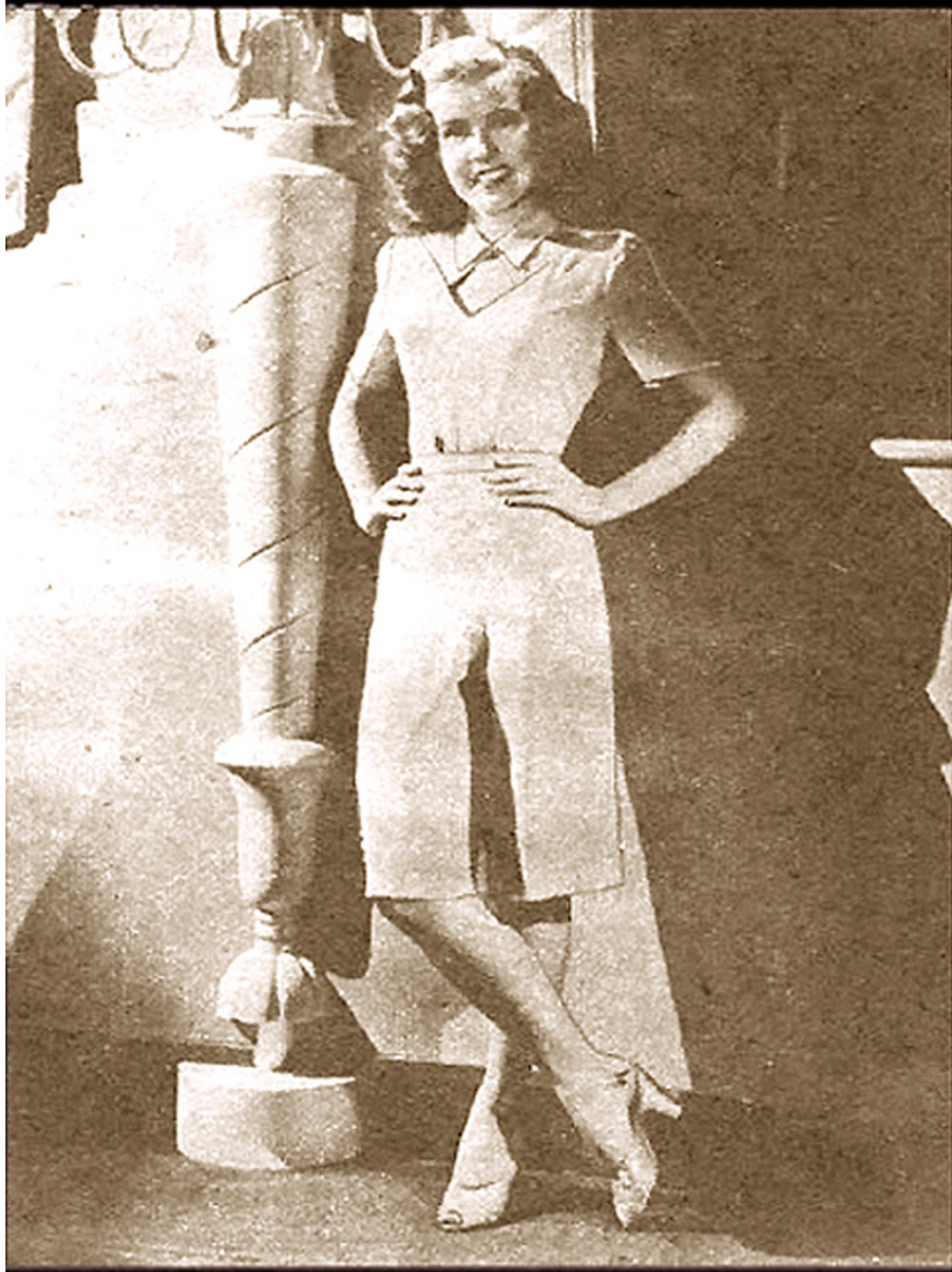
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Skirts go up and necklines down for evening wear.



Men's shirt tails are being worn high this season.



Shortened pajama arms and legs help to save cloth

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Betty Anderson, 19, of Kansas City, Mo., met the shortage of elastic garters by cutting up a pair of gents suspenders, of which there are plenty lying idle.

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