

Why Americans dress so casually

By Roberto A. Ferdman, Washington Post

Look around you, and you'll likely notice a sea of different outfits. You might see similar articles of clothing – even the same ones – worn by different people, but rarely do you find two pairings of tops, bottoms, shoes, and accessories that are exactly alike.

That wasn't always the case, said Deirdre Clemente, a historian of 20th century American culture at UNLV, whose research focuses on fashion and clothing. Americans were far more formal, and formulaic dressers, not all that long ago. Men wore suits, almost without fail – not just to work, but also at school. And women, for the most part, wore long dresses.

Clemente has written extensively about the evolution of American dress in the 1900s, a period that, she said, was marked, maybe more than anything else, by a single but powerful trend: As everyday fashion broke from tradition, it shed much of its socioeconomic implications – people no longer dress to feign wealth like they once did – and took on a new meaning.

The shift has, above all, led toward casualness in the way we dress.

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