

**Source B: Newspaper article from Excelsior on June 10, 1943 -
“Zoot Suit Originated in Georgia; Busboy Ordered First One in ‘40”
by Meyer Berger**

Later historians may argue the point but J. V. D. Carlyle, fashion editor for Men’s Apparel Reporter, the trade’s authority, seemed convinced yesterday that the first zoot suit on record was ordered early in February, 1940, at Frierson-McEver’s in Gainesville, Ga.

The garment so startled A. C. McEver, conservative half of Frierson-McEver, that when the zoot suit was ready he photographed the purchaser, who was Clyde Duncan, a busboy in Gainesville, and send the pictures to Men’s Apparel Reporter. It was published in the February, 1941, issue....

The trade was amused. It was amused that Clyde Duncan was one of those whimsical people who turned up at a tailor’s occasionally with extraordinary ideas, and let it go at that. They were astonished when the “killer diller” caught on in Mississippi, New Orleans and Alabama and then leap-frogged to Harlem. ...

There have been reports that the zoot suit was inspired by authentic Civil War garb worn by Clark Gable as Rhett Butler in “Gone with the Wind.” In several scenes he appeared in a long coat and peg trousers. The report may be true. “Gone with the Wind” opened in Georgia in December, 1939, a few months before Clyde Duncan upset the Gainesville tailors with his order. ...

About a year to eighteen months ago, when the garment trades realized that the zoot suit had caught on in “sharpies” - the help cats, or swing-mad kids - they began turning them out. The suits were listed under the trade term “extremes,” but in April, 1942, when the WPB [War Preparedness Board] cloth conservation order banned pleats, cuffs, and long jackets, all legal manufacturers dropped the zoot.

Bootleg tailors then took them up and still put them out. In New York City, Harlem is the zoot suit center. High school age children from all parts of the city go to Harlem for them. Prices ranged from \$18 to \$75.

Hep-cat terms for the zoot suit are actually meaningless. A “reat pleat” is merely an exaggerated pleat. It had its origin in assonance which colors all hep-cat slang. “Zoot suit” is another example. The “V-knot” tie, the zoot chain, the shirt collar, the tight “stuff cuff,” the wide, flat hat and the Dutch-toe shoes of the zoot-suiter, Mr. Carlyle said, simply display the hep-cat’s tendency toward exaggeration in all things.

Source: Meyer Berger. “Zoot Suit Originated in Georgia; Busboy Ordered First One in ‘40.” Excelsior June 10, 1943. In Elliott J. Gorn, Randy Roberts, and Terry D. Bilhartz, editors. Constructing the American Past: A Source Book of a People’s History. Vol. 2. New York: Pearson Longman, 2005. 191-193.

Images of an authentic Zoot Suit found here: Sharon S. Takeda and Clarissa M. Esguerra. “In Search of an Authentic Zoot Suit.” Unframed. June 16, 2016.

<https://unframed.lacma.org/2016/01/26/search-authentic-zoot-suit>.

