

An Introductory Course

The History of African & Diaspora Fashion

DISCLAIMER

This course is intended as an introduction to the subject matter of the History of African and Diaspora fashion. The lack of documentation on African and Diaspora fashion and textiles is a significant issue. Many stories and traditions have been passed down orally, and while there are published research papers on the subject, they often require decolonisation. The sources and references used in this course have come from the first-hand experiences of and stories from different individuals that they have been told. As a result, some information may not be included.

This course aims to shed light on the rich and diverse History of African and Diaspora fashion and to give a platform for voices and perspectives that have traditionally been marginalised. We encourage our learners to seek additional resources and research for a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. Additionally, due to the lack of documentation and access to specific cultures, we may be unable to cover all aspects of the subject matter.

Please be aware that the information provided in this course is for educational purposes only and should not be used as a substitute for professional advice. We do not guarantee the completeness of any information provided in this course.

We want to ensure that all perspectives are represented, but it is essential to acknowledge that it may not be possible to cover every culture, tradition and history. We apologise in advance if some perspectives or cultures are not represented in this course. We encourage you to seek resources and information from those perspectives to understand the topic comprehensively, or if you have information that could be of benefit, we ask that you share this with us, and we can collectively develop. We hope this course is a starting point for your research and learning journey.

Module 1

Why the History of African and Diaspora Fashion Matters

The History of African and Diaspora fashion reflects the culture and society on the continent and beyond. It tells a story of the people and their traditions, customs, and beliefs. It also showcases African designers' and artisans' creativity, skill, and artistry.

Additionally, African and Diaspora fashion have played and continue to play a role in the global fashion industry, influencing designers and trends worldwide. African and Diaspora fashion also serve as a tool for cultural preservation and expression. Historically, traditional garments and textiles have been important markers of identity and are essential to many African cultures.

Knowing the History of African and Diaspora fashion helps to document the economic and sociological changes and can be used to understand the cultural interactions that shaped Africa. It also plays an essential role in understanding the indigenous knowledge, techniques, and materials passed down through generations.

Module 2

Understanding the Background of Wax Prints

Wax print, also known as Dutch wax or Ankara print, is a type of brightly coloured, patterned cotton fabric popular in many African countries. It is believed to have originated in the Netherlands in the 19th century and was originally manufactured for the Indonesian market. However, it quickly became popular in West Africa and has become a staple of African fashion. The wax print fabric became popular in West Africa in the early 20th century, mainly due to the influence of European traders and colonisers. Kitenge is also a kind of wax print which is popular in East Africa.

In many African countries, wax print fabric has become an essential part of traditional and cultural dress. The wax print fabric has also become an essential part of the fashion industry in the Diaspora.

Contemporary African fashion designers and stylists use the fabric to create modern and stylish clothing and accessories. In recent years, the history of wax print fabric has been the subject of renewed interest and discussion as people have begun to question the origins of the fabric and the role of European and Asian manufacturers and traders in developing this iconic African textile.

Module 3

An Introduction to the History of Fashion in North Africa

This module will focus on the fashion history in Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Sudan and Morocco. It will explore each country's evolution and examine how the cultural exchange between the nations influenced the region's craftsmanship over time.

Embroidery is one key element that distinguishes the North from the rest of the continent. For years this region has been a source of inspiration for Western designers, such as Yves Saint Laurent's notable SS' 1976 African collection, which drew on Berber tribes who hail from the Maghreb region. This module will also look at tribal fashion, such as Berber tribes, and how they continue to influence fashion today.

Beyond weaving techniques, we look at the meaning behind these detailed patterns and how they are employed to explore themes like religion, war, trade and environmental disasters. We will also explore how the industry was powered by fibres such as wool and cotton.

Module 4

An Introduction to the History of Fashion in East Africa

This module will focus on the history of fashion in Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Somaliland, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Since the Paleolithic era, clothing has been made from animal skins.

This module will examine how this region developed methods for making leather from animal skins and the various tanning procedures used throughout East Africa. It will cover cotton's value in the textile industry and its by-products such as the kitenge.

We will look at the nuances of wax print in the east and how to distinguish them from West and Central Africa. Louis Vuitton SS'12 famously used fabrics similar to that of the Maasai tribes in Kenya. We look at some of the most popular textiles and explore how they gained global recognition.

Module 5

An Introduction to the History of Fashion in Southern Africa

This module will focus on the history of fashion in Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The Southern region had a more extended relationship with animal skin until trade, missionary activity, and colonisation brought fabric made of materials like cotton to the area.

This module will explore how that shaped that region and informed their fashion through the years, such as the clothes worn by the Herero people in Namibia. It will also look at the practical use of wrapping garments, namely the capulana and the kana, which were made of cloth but have also been produced as wax prints in recent years.

The module also looks at fashion's role in people's day-to-day lives through cultural theories like Bangologia. Additionally, it will highlight fashion pioneers like Maxhosa, who threads the past with the future.

Module 6

An Introduction to the History of Fashion in West Africa

This module will focus on the history of fashion in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

In this module, we will explore key fashion moments and pioneers, such as the crucial role a group of entrepreneurial women known as the Nana Benz played in the inception of wax prints and the Western Fashion movement in the 1980s. In a globalised world, a lot of history gets lost. Several Western textiles and garments have been exported to the West, and their usage there has been given a new meaning, like the Kente and Dashiki.

This module will look at the historical evolution of fashion in the region. We will look at how trade transformed the fashion industry with introduction items like beads and how the region incorporates natural resources to produce fabrics like Bogolan Fabric or Mud Cloth.

Module 7

An Introduction to the History of Fashion in Central Africa

This module will focus on the history of fashion in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Sao Tome & Principe.

This module covers fashion and cultural movements such as La Sape in Congo led by the subculture les sapeurs. In this module, we look at plant-based clothing, such as raffia cloth woven from palm leaves and bark cloth made from the inner bark of trees. It also covers fabrics, such as the toghu and pagne used as headwraps, blankets and child carriers.

Module 8

An Introduction to the History of the Afro-Arab Fashion Industry

A growing movement has emerged in recent years to honour and celebrate Afro-Arab fashion to embrace the rich cultural heritage of the African and Arab worlds. Afro-Arab fashion refers to the styles, trends, and influences shared or intersected between the African and Arab worlds.

This module will explore traditional clothing, modern streetwear, and high fashion styles that draw inspiration from African and Arab cultural influences. This will also include traditional and contemporary fashion designers creating unique and innovative styles that blend African and Arab influences.

This module will also explore how Afro-Arab fashion incorporates elements of both African and Arab traditional dress, such as flowing robes, head wraps, and bold patterns and colours. It will cover Sudanese, Egyptian, Moroccan, Algerian, Sahrawi, Mauritanian, Yemeni, and Tunisian communities.

Module 9

An Introduction to the History of the Afro-Brazilian Fashion Industry

This module looks at the history of fashion of Afro-Brazilians of African descent who live in Brazil. Afro-Brazilian fashion is a style of fashion that the cultural traditions and aesthetics of Afro-Brazilian people have influenced. It often incorporates elements of traditional African clothing, such as bold prints, bright colours, intricate patterns, and modern and contemporary styles.

Afro-Brazilian fashion can be seen in various contexts, including in the street, at parties and events, and on the runway. One example is the *pano da costa* which is linked to Yoruba mythology. Another example is the *Baiana de Acarajé*, a dress that Bahainas wear in honour of the Candomblé religion.

Today, traditional clothing is hardly visible outside of rural areas, they are saved for special occasions, and this module explores this evolution.

Module 10

An Introduction to the History of the Afro-Italian Fashion Industry

This module will look at the history of fashion of Afro-Italian communities, who are individuals of African descent who live in Italy. Afro-Italian fashion is a style influenced by the cultural traditions and aesthetics of Afro-Italian people.

This module will look at individuals like Stella Jean, a Haitian-Italian designer attempting to transform the Italian fashion industry by collaborating with African designers. It will also look at creatives like Edward Buchanan and Michelle Ngomo, who are fighting for more visibility for the black community in Italy.

Module 11

An Introduction to the History of Jewellery and Accessories in Africa and the Diaspora

This module will examine the history of jewellery and accessories in Africa and the Diaspora. The history of Afro-jewellery is complex and diverse, reflecting the many different cultures, traditions, and influences that have shaped the continent and its people. In Africa, traditional jewellery and accessories have long been used to mark important life events, such as births, marriages, and deaths. They also have symbolic and spiritual significance, with many pieces believed to possess protective powers.

Traditional African jewellery and accessories are often made from shells, beads, metals, and fabrics and are often decorated with intricate designs and patterns. During the transatlantic slave trade, millions of Africans were forcibly transported to the Americas, bringing their cultural traditions, including jewellery-making. However, under the harsh conditions of slavery, many African artisans were forced to abandon their traditional practices and adapt to the materials and techniques of their new surroundings. As a result, Afro-inspired jewellery and accessories began to take on new forms, such as using cowrie shells or coins as adornments.

Today, African-inspired jewellery and accessories are an important part of the fashion and design world, with many contemporary designers and artisans drawing inspiration from traditional techniques and materials to create novel pieces.

Module 12

An Introduction to the History of Beauty and Hair

This module will examine the history of beauty and hair in Africa and the Diaspora. In traditional African societies, beauty and hair were often closely linked to cultural beliefs. Many African cultures believed that hair symbolised one's spiritual and social identity. As such, it was often styled and adorned in specific ways to reflect an individual's status, age, and gender. Hairstyles and adornments were worn for different occasions, such as weddings, funerals, and religious ceremonies.

Historically, many Afro cultures used natural oils, such as coconut, shea, and palm, to moisturise and condition the hair. They also used herbs, roots, and other natural ingredients to create hair treatments and styles. Today, there is a growing interest in natural hair care among people of African descent and a renewed focus on traditional African hair care practices and hairstyles. Many contemporary hairstylists, barbers, and hair care product creators look to traditional African techniques and ingredients to create new and exciting products.

Module 13

An Introduction to the History of the Afro-Latinx Fashion Industry

This module will look at the history of fashion of the Afro-Latinx community of Latin American descent and African ancestry. It will focus on fashion history in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador.

This module will also look at the history of slavery and how some cultural practices remain today, like how Afro-Latina women were compelled to cover their heads with colourful headscarves. It will also look at garments like the Koto dress, which is linked to Afro-Surinamese culture and how it is tied can convey the mood of the wearer or a message they might secretly want to send to another person.

Module 14

An Introduction to the History of the Black British Fashion Industry

This module will look at fashion styles, trends, and influences specific to Black British, who are people of African descent living in the United Kingdom. Black British fashion refers to the styles, trends, and influences specific to Black people living in the United Kingdom.

This module will explore the work of important figures such as the Grandassa Models and Kwame Braithwaite. It will also cover how themes like music and religion influenced personal style. In recent times, this module will explore how pioneers like Naomi Campbell and Edward Enninful changed the perception of Black people in fashion media and the positions they could occupy.

Module 15

An Introduction to the History of the Black American Fashion Industry

Throughout the history of the United States, Black Americans have played a significant role in shaping fashion trends and styles. Black American fashion encompasses many styles, including traditional African dress, streetwear, and high fashion. This module examines the fashion styles, trends, and influences specific to Black Americans.

From the early 20th century onward, Black American fashion has been influenced by various cultural and social movements, such as the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights movement, and the Black Power movement. Today, Black American fashion continues to evolve and change, with designers and fashion influencers creating a wide range of styles that reflect the diversity and creativity of the Black American community.

Module 16

An Introduction To The History Of The Caribbean And French West Indies Fashion Industry

This module looks at the history of fashion in Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Lucia, the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Saint Martin, and Saint Barthélemy. The module will examine how colonialism and slavery-sourced textiles are still in use today, such as the Madras from India, handwoven light cotton fabric with vibrant checked patterns is the main fabric used to create traditional clothing for the Antilleans.

This module will also discuss how the Lesser Antilles' cultural creolisation produced the famous creole dresses. These were greatly influenced by the clothing worn by French women in the 17th and 18th centuries, particularly the douillette, also known as the wob dwiyet. This module will also discuss the attire of slave women, which includes chemise-jupes.

Module 17

An Introduction of Fashion Photography in Africa and the Diaspora

The history of fashion photography in Africa and the Diaspora is relatively new but has gained more recognition recently. It has been shaped by the history and culture of the continent and by the increasing visibility and influence of African and Diaspora fashion in the global industry. African fashion photography began to emerge in the post-colonial era as independent African photographers used their work to showcase the diversity and creativity of the continent's fashion scene.

These photographers often used their work to challenge stereotypes and representations of Africa and its people and to promote a more positive and nuanced image of the continent. The module will examine the work of photographers such as Samuel Fosso, Seydou Keita, Malick Sidibe, and Yves Vernin, among others, who used their work to highlight the African fashion industry's skills, traditions and creativity.

The module will also explore how photography helped showcase the creativity of African designers and tailors, the use of indigenous textiles, and the dynamic street style.

Mode of Study

One of the unique features of this course is that it will be offered asynchronously, meaning that you will have the flexibility to complete the coursework on your own schedule. However, there will be a few live sessions scheduled throughout the course, and we will provide more information on these sessions at a later date.

Throughout the course, you will have access to a variety of learning materials, including presentations, videos, audio lessons, PDFs, and journal articles. This diverse range of content will allow you to engage with the material in a way that best suits your learning style.

We look forward to exploring the exciting world of the History of African and Diaspora fashion with you!

How Do I Enrol?

Enrolment for the History of African and Diaspora Fashion course will begin on February 3rd, 2023.

This course is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of fashion within the African and Diaspora communities and highlight the cultural and social influences that have shaped it over time.

The course will be delivered through the online learning platform, Thinkific, which will provide you with a range of content, including presentations, videos, audio lessons, PDFs, and journal articles.

Enrolling in the course is simple. Simply visit the Thinkific website (a link will be provided on the 3rd of February) and register as a student. Once registered, you will have access to all course materials and be able to participate in the live sessions.

You will have access to the course in April 2023, and we will keep registered students informed of any updates or changes.

We look forward to welcoming you to the course and embarking on this journey of exploring the rich History of African and Diaspora fashion.

FAQs

When does the short course start?

The course will commence in April 2023.

How much does the course cost?

There is a \$50 fee to access the course.

How many modules are in the course?

To date, we have 17 modules.

Who is the course for?

Students, Academics, Researchers, Professionals and Entrepreneurs.
Anyone with a keen interest to learn more about African and Diapora fashion

Is the course video based?

The course is a combination of video, audio, text, PDFs, external resources, and infographics.

What qualifications are required before applying for the course?

No qualifications are required.

Will the course be live?

The course is asynchronous, and this is done to accommodate all learners and make the completion of the course as smooth as possible. Specifically, time zone differences, learning disabilities such as dyslexia, and internet connectivity issues.

What language will the course be delivered in?

English.

How long must I dedicate to studying each week?

You will be required to dedicate a minimum of 6 hours weekly to the course.