



The Right to Fashion in the Age of Terrorism

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The Right to Fashion in the Age of Terrorism

The fuck-me shoes of last season, and the conspicuous consumption behind them, are relics from another age. I saw the change firsthand in the days immediately after the attack, when I walked downtown from my apartment on East 76th Street instead of taking the subway. . . . I wore loafers and pants . . . and I was not alone: Women were wearing running shoes, sturdy sandals, flats—nothing fancy, nothing strappy, nothing higher than a 1-inch heel. The same has been true ever since. This is part of the power of the World Trade Center attack.

—Jori Finkel (2001)

Art critic and journalist Jori Finkel's observations are suggestive of the collateral impact of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on every facet of life in New York City, including women's sartorial choices. The profound shift in New York women's outlook on fashion was expressed over and over in the media: "After 9/11, it feels unconscionable and insensitive to be trying to be up to the minute" (Trebay 2001, A15). In the same news article, another woman explains, "Ever since the attacks, I have no heart for shopping" (A15). And a journalist for the now-defunct *Mademoiselle* magazine confided to the *New York Observer* that the \$500 Tracy Feith dress she had splurged on on September 10 lost its value entirely on September 11. "I literally wanted to flush it down the toilet. It just didn't matter" (in Muhlke 2001). While most economists agree that the United States was already heading toward a recession before September 11 and that consumer confidence and spending habits had been declining for some time, the emotional toll of the attacks clearly

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exacerbated the downturn (Makinen 2002). Howard Davidowitz, chairman of a New York–based retail consulting firm, described the situation succinctly: “Everything is in a funk, from Duane Reade to Bergdorf Goodman. . . . Business was not good to begin with, but now it went off a cliff” (in Muhlke 2001).¹

Despite the foreboding of early sartorial doomsayers, we now know that fashion and consumerism did not stop mattering after September 11 in New York City or elsewhere. In fact, as this essay will discuss, fashion and fashion consumerism were key factors in the short-term economic and emotional recovery of the United States after September 11, thanks to the efforts of a myriad of fashion industry and civic groups as well as to the efforts of neoliberal politicians who rearticulated consumerism as the right and duty of freedom-loving civilized people and fashion as the ideal outward expression of such people. New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani’s speech at the launch of the Fashion for America: Shop to Show Your Support campaign encapsulates the fashion-as-a-right discourse that would reverberate in the national consumer culture imaginary for years following September 11: “Freedom to shop is one of the fundamental liberties [that] terrorists want to deprive us of” (in Trebay 2001, A15).² In this and other post–September 11 campaigns for fashion consumerism, fashion emblemizes and enacts multiple neoliberal freedoms, including the freedom to consume and, connected to that, the freedoms of self-expression and self-determination. All these freedoms, Americans were told, were under threat in the age of terror.

This article intends to examine the configuration and effects of the fashion-as-a-right discourse. The questions that guide this discussion are as follows: First, above all other kinds of consumerism promoted to get the economy back on track after September 11, why was fashion consumerism especially significant? Second, how was fashion tied to democratic rights in this historical moment? And third, how did this association induce enthusiastic consumerism in women who, in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, had “no heart for shopping” (Trebay 2001, A15)? Briefly, this essay is concerned with the construction and instrumentalization of an ethical sartorial politics that articulated fashion as the measure

¹ The cancellation of Fashion Week Spring 2002 alone had a significant impact on the city’s economy, which has in the past relied on this semiannual event to generate revenue from apparel and advertising sales and from the myriad hospitality services that the ten thousand people who descend on Bryant Park, the event venue, usually demand.

² The freedom to shop for fashion first and foremost is implied here, since Giuliani is speaking on behalf of the Fashion for America campaign and at the VHI/*Vogue* Fashion Awards, an event that celebrates fashion designers and fashionable rock stars.

of and means to a multiplicity of democratic rights, including but not limited to the rights to self-expression and self-determination. Fashion journalists and neoliberal politicians assigned the responsibility of preserving and securing these rights, which characterize the American way of life, to consumer-citizens. Thus, the task of restoring the economy included a civic dimension. With the economy back on track, the country would also be put back on track against the purported wishes of terrorists who “hate our freedoms” (Bush 2001f). Chief among these freedoms is consumerist liberty, as Giuliani and many others asserted. Along with the intertwined economic and civic duties, the fashion-as-a-right discourse authorized matters of self-adornment as personal duties. Anna Wintour, editor-in-chief of American *Vogue* and doyenne of American fashion, wrote in the November 2001 issue of *Vogue*, “Fashion is essential in these difficult times, paradoxically, to keep us in touch with our dreamy, fanciful, self-pleasing natures” (2001, 86). In Foucauldian terms, Wintour’s formulation of consumerism interarticulates biopolitics and national politics so that the care of the self is made coextensive with the care of the nation. I examine the configuration and effects of this interarticulation in greater detail in my discussion of the Fashion for America campaign, which Wintour helped launch just weeks after the attacks.

The latter portion of my essay explores the ways in which the fashion-as-a-right discourse operates in the popular domain of cheap chic fashion, a mass style of budget-consciousness that celebrities and celebrity designers helped create. Cheap chic fashion represents the full extent of fashion’s neoliberal democratic possibilities according to designers and retailers. Seizing on the prevailing language of equality, proponents asserted that cheap chic enabled the explicitly nonracial Everywoman (since cheap chic lines typically offer only women’s wear) the ultimate freedom to express herself because it freed her from oppressive socioeconomic constraints. Focusing on Target’s cheap chic Design for All collection and actress and fashion icon Sarah Jessica Parker’s wildly popular cheap chic label Bitten, I consider the ways in which racial and class distinctions are concealed by the universalist language of sartorial democracy.

Fashion, against the burqa

Less than one week after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, when White House rationalizations for a U.S.-led military invasion of Afghanistan were ramped up to a fever pitch, campaigns for consumerism began proliferating across the country. I discuss some of these campaigns in this essay. But first, why is fashion consumerism, above

other kinds of consumerism, such a significant site of inquiry? In answering this, it is necessary to consider the significance of the burqa. In other words, fashion came to matter as an emblem of democracy because journalists strategically and successfully positioned fashion against the burqa, which was widely denigrated and dismissed in the national imaginary as the material sign and symptom of gender-repressive antiliberalism, or what one fashion journalist brashly called “anticivilization” (Stanfill 2002, 154). Such perceptions of the burqa build on an ideological sartorial logic that is rooted in centuries of imperialist knowledge about the depravities of the Orient, often viewed through the lens of the West’s fears and fantasies about Oriental women.³ Consider, for example, an October 2001 article for the *New York Times Magazine* in which the fashion journalist asks readers to “imagine . . . spending a day in the pale blue burkas worn by women under the Taliban in Afghanistan” (Spindler 2001, 66). Counting on the unimaginableness of this scenario for her U.S. readers, she continues, “The freedom of women and men to express themselves through their dress is a trifle, of course, until it’s taken away” (66).

Two weeks later, Janelle Brown declared in the online magazine *Salon* that “frivolous fashion is itself a patriotic symbol of America: You may never be able to afford that shredded Georgette Givenchy gown, but at least you aren’t forced to live underneath a burqa” (2001). And in the March 2002 issue of the American lifestyle magazine *Town and Country*, Francesca Stanfill rhetorically asked, “Why bother with fashion at all?” Her answer is rooted in and perpetuates a civilizational logic that is fundamental to the larger national discourse about Afghanistan in the years immediately before but especially after September 11: “The first haunting images transmitted from Taliban-occupied Afghanistan . . . showed us, if anything, that clothes and appearance are not trivial. Where vanity had been eradicated, so had women’s voices; where reverence for beauty had been denied, so had education; and where vision-obscuring burkhas were forced upon women, there was no hope for a humane future. . . . Only now have we discovered the chilling extent of this anticivilization” (2002, 154).

Western constructions of the burqa as necessarily contrary to women’s freedom enabled U.S. newspapers to announce, upon the fall of Mazar-e-Sharif on November 11, 2001, that newly liberated Afghan women were figuratively and literally throwing off their veils. “Veil Is Lifted in Mazar-e-Sharif; New Freedoms Embraced as City Emerges from Taliban Rule,”

³ See Papanek and Minault (1982), El Guindi (1999), Abu-Lughod (2002), Moallem (2005), Scott (2007), and McLarney (2009).

the *Washington Post* declared on November 12 (Struck 2001, A17); “Women Shedding Cloak of Taliban Oppression” was a *Boston Globe* headline on November 26 (Ozernoy 2001, A8); and in the *Denver Post* on November 27, an article proclaimed, “Veil Lifts on Afghan Women’s Future” (Florio 2001, A13).

As many have already noted, cultural and state productions of the burqa-clad Afghan woman as a sign of antiliberal gender and sexual oppression substantiated the humanitarian justification for the war in Afghanistan.⁴ The U.S. State Department’s Report on the Taliban’s War against Women is a well-known and instructive example of the production and institutionalization of meanings about veiled women in general and burqa-clad Afghan women in particular:

The Taliban brutally enforced a dress code that required women to be covered under a burqa—a voluminous, tent-like full-body outer garment that covers them from head to toe. . . . The burqa’s veil is so thick that the wearer finds it difficult to breathe; the small mesh panel permitted for seeing allows such limited vision that even crossing the street safely is difficult. . . .

The burqa is not only a physical and psychological burden on some Afghan women, it is a significant economic burden as well. Many women cannot afford the cost of one. In some cases, whole neighborhoods share a single garment, and women must wait days for their turn to go out. (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor 2001)

The report emphasizes the burqa’s infringement on women’s freedoms of movement (even crossing the street safely is difficult), of expression (the Taliban brutally enforced a dress code), and of self-determination (women must wait days for their turn to go out). Constructions of the burqa as outside the ambit of freedom—indeed, as contrary to freedom—made it possible and quite easy for fashion consumerism campaigns to position the burqa against fashion and to imagine fashion as the exemplary sign of freedom in the post-September 11 era. In fact, as we see from the previous examples, the burqa operates as the mechanism by which fashion’s virtues are made intelligible. Counteracting the decline in consumer confidence and spending that began before September 11 but was exacerbated in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, the cultural and political production of the burqa enabled the fashion industry to adju-

⁴ See Ahmed (2003), Al-Ani (2003), Donnell (2003), and Soueif (2003). See Graham-Brown (1988) for historical representations of Afghan women through the Western gaze.

dicating and valorizing fashion as a measure and means for enacting precisely the freedoms of movement, expression, and self-determination that the burqa was imagined to deny. In this way, the fashion-as-a-right discourse (exemplified in Giuliani's many speeches promoting Fashion for America) and the humanitarian rhetoric of the war on terror are mutually constitutive.

The sartorial ideological logic that organizes and reproduces the fashion-burqa dichotomy engenders neoliberal subjects who are recruited to engage in economic activities as a means of exercising an array of related economic and political freedoms. Stacey L. Mayhall has argued that "investors and workers were gender coded as male warrior types, whereas consumers, who were urged to shop to save the country, were coded female" (2009, 34). While Mayhall overstates the situation (men were also interpellated as consumer patriots whose duty it was to buy expensive electronics and take their families on vacation), her point about the gendered dimension of neoliberal consumerism is well taken. Consumerism and especially fashion consumerism are traditionally associated with the feminine, and particularly with feminine excess. Comedies about women lured by the latest dress or the current "it" handbag to overdraw their bank accounts, to the chagrin of their economically and emotionally exasperated husbands, are stock narratives in American culture.

Post-September 11 neoliberalism's gendered formation is manifested in relation to the national anxiety about the burqa that emerged in the years immediately prior to and following the terrorist attacks. Afghan men's adornment practices were also raised as evidence of the Taliban's brutal micropower over the most intimate spheres of everyday life: in his address to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001, George W. Bush condemned the Taliban for jailing a man "if his beard is not long enough" (2001f). But it was against the burqa and burqa-clad women that fashion and consumerism exemplified the measure and means of freedom in the U.S. cultural imaginary. Ellen McLarney's (2009) essay on the burqa's transformation from a sign of absolute difference to an exotic commodity—from "shock to chic" (1)—documents the many cultural productions that focused on the burqa as "a tool of extremists and the epitome of political and sexual repression" (1). In addition to the State Department's report, McLarney discusses the documentary *Beneath the Veil*, which aired on CNN in "seeming synchrony with U.S. military strategy" (3); Oprah Winfrey's monologue reading of "Under the Burqa" in Eve Ensler's all-star production of her episodic play *The Vagina Monologues* at Madison Square Garden; and Laura Bush's national radio address on the Taliban's subjugation of women. To this list, I would add George

W. Bush's numerous anecdotes involving Christian and Jewish women escorting "women of cover" on shopping trips (Bush 2001a; see also Bush 2001b, 2001c): "In many cities when Christian and Jewish women learned that Muslim women, women of cover, were afraid of going out of their homes alone . . . they went shopping with them . . . they showed true friendship and support, an act that shows the world the true nature of America," Bush told CNN (2001a). Each of these gendered productions of the consumer patriot depends on the image of a victimized veiled woman who is imagined to be in need of rescue not simply from the burqa and the Taliban but to neoliberal sites where a woman's freedom includes her freedom of consumerist choices.

Bush imagines consumerism as a technique of universal feminist empowerment that links and liberates women across differences. By enabling women of cover to shop, Christian and Jewish women (all liberated, presumably) provide them with the freedom of choice that Inderpal Grewal asserts is the "central ethical framework" (2005, 3) linking feminism and consumer culture: "The idea of 'having choices' [is] the opposite of 'being oppressed'" (28). But Bush's parable has contradictory effects. While it intends to demonstrate consumerism as essential to self-expression and freedom of movement (both assumed to be universally desired among all peoples), the story depends on and reifies the inexorable difference of women of cover. The visual truth of this difference is evidenced by Bush's reliance on an ahistorical and homogenizing representation of the veil. The exoticization of this dress practice establishes asymmetrical distinctions between Christian and Jewish women and "other" women. Bush's rescue narrative depends on the "Manichaean relationship between a feminist agent (consumer/entrepreneur) and her 'other' (the indigenous female producer/resource)" even while it promotes progressive gender politics of women's liberation (Kaplan 1995, 50). The discursive construction of the difference of women of cover reveals what many are arguing is the legal and social production of Muslims as either hypervisible victims or hypervisible criminals (Moallem 2002; Bayoumi 2006; Naber 2008). The category of women of cover is exemplary of neoliberal multiculturalism's "[break] with an older racism's reliance on phenotype to innovate new ways of fixing human capacities to naturalize inequality" (Melamed 2006, 14). Jodi Melamed observes that "the new racism deploys economic, ideological, cultural, and religious distinctions to produce lesser personhoods" (14). As we have seen in cultural and state productions of the burqa and the turban in the pre- and post-September 11 eras, sartorial distinctions also inform "new categories of privilege and stigma across conventional racial categories" (14). Indeed, the aural slippage between

the phrases “women of cover” and “women of color” makes clear the racialized difference of women of cover.

In Bush’s story, the gendered performance of the United States’ “true nature” is exhibited not only in neoliberal feminist projects of consumerism but also in public displays of consumerism (“show . . . the world the true nature of America”; Bush 2001a). These displays served a number of political functions, some of which are discussed in the following section. In the story Bush tells, though, they work to bring women of cover out of their homes and into public domains of consumerism where they can engage in the circuits of global capitalism. Public displays of consumerism simultaneously enact both physical and political liberation. Conspicuous consumerism metaphorically inaugurates a process of political visibility that rescues women of cover from an unmodern and oppressive invisibility—a condition suggested by phrases like Stanfill’s “vision-obscuring burkhas” (2002, 154)—to consumerist sites in which they might fashion not only their own individual bodies but also their social bodies as neoliberal feminist subjects. For Bush and many others, this is the emancipatory potential of neoliberal capitalism.

Like so many rescue narratives that are structured by civilizationalist differentiations, the emancipation of women of cover is conditioned by uneven and imperialist structures of power that reproduce marginalization. The logic of Bush’s story depends on the occlusion of a number of inconvenient truths, including, first, the ways in which rescue narratives involving literal and figurative unveilings operate as technologies of biopower that are put on display in order to police and discipline the everyday practices of Muslim women’s self-care. Mimi Thi Nguyen’s (2011) examination of the Kabul Beauty School and its utilization of beauty as a metaphor for the correction and transformation of veiled Afghan women into modern liberal subjects who desire appropriate aesthetic and political ideals is a different but related example of this. Second, Bush’s emancipation story denies the legislative assaults on civil liberties that proliferated in the post-September 11 moment. It wasn’t just hate crimes that veiled Muslim American women feared but the institutionalized apparatuses that pathologized veils and veiled Muslim women as passive victims. And finally, Bush’s story reproduces the figure of the veiled woman as victim and in so doing occludes the ways in which Muslim American communities negotiated Islamophobic threats. Alison Donnell describes the numerous “affirmative *fatwas* published in *al-Majalla* magazine allowing women to remove their scarves in public” as well as the public advice given by the U.S.-based Muslim Women’s League: “If a Muslim woman senses a possible danger to herself, adjusting her attire to minimize the chances of

physical attack is a logical and Islamically permissible precaution” (2003, 122). These occlusions demonstrate, to quote Nadine Naber, that “‘visibility’ is a power-laden project that has the effect of silencing critiques of state violence and structural inequalities that produce hatred and racism—but also reveal[s] the objectification that often accompanies ‘inclusion’” (2008, 3).

I examine the significance of public displays of consumerism in greater detail in the next section. I highlight, in particular, the moral and market configurations of the get-out-and-shop discourses that were so pervasive in post-September 11 consumerism campaigns.

Fashion for America

In the aftermath of the most devastating act of terrorism on U.S. soil, an act that State Department spokesman Richard Boucher suggested “threaten[ed] not just one state but rather civilization itself,” Americans were persuaded to shop (quoted in Merzer, Landay, and Hutcheson 2001, A1). Shopping was more than just a matter of getting the country’s economy back on track; shopping was articulated as a defiant stance against terrorism. As Vice President Dick Cheney explained on NBC’s *Meet the Press* less than one week after the terrorist attacks, “I . . . hope the American people [will], in effect, stick their thumb in the eye of the terrorists and . . . not let what’s happened here in any way throw off their normal level of economic activity” (quoted in Purdum 2001, A2). Not long after Cheney’s consumerist homily, President Bush issued his own counterterrorist consumerism rallying cry, urging Americans to “get on board . . . [and] get down to Disney World” and declaring that “we will not surrender our freedom to travel [to] terrorist activity” (2001d). And on November 8, Bush again affirmed the link between consumerism and counterterrorism when he urged Americans to “[go] about their daily lives, working and shopping and playing” (2001e). He commended Americans who did so for “refusing to give terrorists the power” (2001e). In each of these articulations, consumerism and freedom are positioned against terrorism, and as such, economic activity is classified as a universal social good. After all, who doesn’t want freedom? Who isn’t against terrorism? Who doesn’t want to shop for America?

The president’s and vice president’s calls to oppose terrorism by shopping were answered by a great number of individuals and groups across the country who participated in organized as well as diffuse consumerism campaigns. The counterterrorist consumerism rhetoric took a decidedly probusiness stance that emerged from and perpetuated an extensive legacy

of neoliberal politics and policies. Probusiness lobbying groups such as the International Mass Retail Association (which helped organize a nationally televised shopping spree) went into action immediately after the attacks, tapping into consumers' psyches and pocketbooks. By linking consumerism to freedom, post-September 11 consumerism campaigns functioned as a technology of governmentality that produced consumer patriots who "are controlled," as Wendy Brown has observed in a different context, "*through* their freedom" (2005, 44). The fear of terrorism (in all its racialized, sexualized, gendered, and Islamophobic forms) and its perceived threat to the American way of life constructed and managed consumer patriots across the class and political spectrums, patriots who were persuaded to get out and shop for America—at times paying full price for expensive items, as I demonstrate below.

It was with the goal of getting Americans to publicly display their consumer patriotism that San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown, Pennsylvania Congressman John E. Peterson, Minnesota Congressman Mark Kennedy, and five thousand economic missionaries from Oregon and California led the consumer citizenry by example in three notable post-September 11 consumerism campaigns, each of which followed the neoliberal principle that the expansion of the economy leads to the preservation and expansion of democracy (imagined as under threat from terrorists).

In October 2001, San Francisco Mayor Brown launched a campaign called America: Open for Business. Intended "to let the world know that this city [San Francisco], and this nation, will rise from the ashes of the national tragedy and get this economy moving again" (2001), this campaign urged Bay Area residents to "re-invest in America" by "re-discover[ing] the City's world-famous attractions and hidden neighborhood treasures!" Of these attractions and treasures, Brown suggested, "Treat yourself to our amazing diversity of world-class restaurants! Visit our museums, our theaters, our nightclubs! Take a cable car half-way to the stars!" As part of the campaign, posters depicting the American flag with shopping bag handles drawn on it were created and distributed first to Bay Area regional businesses and then to businesses in midwestern and East Coast cities such as Chicago and Rochester, New York. These posters visually express what a Deloitte Research survey (conducted between September 27 and October 4, 2001) confirmed: after September 11, most Americans (74 percent) believed shopping was their "patriotic duty" (cited in Larson 2001).

Also in October 2001, Congressmen Peterson and Kennedy, in collaboration with lobbyists for a retail association, headed to the Potomac

Yard shopping plaza in Alexandria, Virginia (along with a cadre of reporters, photographers, and cameramen), to buy, among other items, a portable stereo, tennis shoes, and McDonald's lunches. During the event, Peterson took care to announce his decision to buy the more expensive of the three portable stereos available—an Aiwa three-disc changer for \$139.99. “It’s more than he wants to spend, perhaps, but sacrifices must be made. There’s a war on, after all” (Lancaster 2001, C1). Following Peterson, Kennedy remarked to reporters that consumerist sites are now battlegrounds in the war on terror: “We have a front in Afghanistan. We have a front in homeland security. But we also have a front in the economy” (C1).

And finally, between October and December 2001, Mitch Goldstone, Sho Dozono, and approximately five thousand other Christians signed up for church-organized Christmas shopping trips to New York City dubbed Flights for Freedom. Dozono, a community organizer in Oregon and also chair of the Portland Chamber of Commerce, explained the mission of Flights for Freedom in this way: “It’s about not being cowed by terrorists. . . . We’re saying, ‘Well, heck with that. You know, let’s take our lives back. Let’s be free, as Americans have been before’” (quoted in Fogarty 2001). These economic missionaries were driven by “a moral imperative, not to spend a little more but to spend a lot more” (MacDonald 2001, 1). Speaking of some Oregonian missionaries who purchased discount travel packages (\$379 for airfare and two nights at the lavish Waldorf Astoria, or \$434 for three nights at the same hotel), Goldstone grumbled, “I fail to see the economic patriotism in that” (1).

The consumer patriotism in these examples is connected to a larger history of consumer citizenship even while it is distinct from that history. A brief discussion of several key moments in the history of consumer citizenship is useful to draw out the distinct character of the post-September 11 consumer patriotism formation.

As consumerism histories bear out, the meanings of consumer citizenship are highly unstable. During the 1930s, a period in which, according to Lizabeth Cohen (2003), the defining character of white American identity shifted from production to consumption—marking the inauguration of the United States as a “consumer’s republic”—the state began recognizing the “converging interests of consumers in the economy and voting citizens in a democracy” (27). Advertisers played a significant role in reinforcing this link. Charles McGovern writes, “advertisers utilized . . . political metaphors to describe consumption, goods, and consumers. In metaphors equating consumers with citizens and purchasing with vot-

ing, admen portrayed consumption as a true exercise of the individual's civic role and public identity; consumption was the ritual means of affirming one's nationality as an American" (1998, 43).

However, with the onset of World War II, good citizens were reimagined as disciplined and modest consumers. Wartime consumerism campaigns emphasized and enforced consumer constraint by rationing commodities and urging "responsible" Americans to save money (for future postwar spending) by investing in defense bonds. The promotion of judicious consumer citizenship was responsible for the record 21 percent increase in personal savings between 1941 and 1945 (Cohen 2003, 71).

It is important to note here that women played a crucial role early on in the history of U.S. consumerism. The consumer movement that New Deal President Franklin Delano Roosevelt helped build was largely guided by white middle-class women's groups such as the American Home Economics Association, the American Association of University Women, and the General Federation of Women's Clubs. In this new leadership role, women "turned a customary responsibility [of economic household management] into a new political opportunity" (Cohen 2003, 83). By World War II, as Cohen explains, "good citizenship and good consumership were promoted as inseparable, and women gained special stewardship over both" (83).

While early consumer citizenship campaigns enabled and enlisted white middle-class women to assert their gender and economic rights through the consumers' rights movement, these rights were not extended to all women across race and class differences. For example, at the turn of the century, when retail sites, especially department stores, held out the promise of economic and social independence for white women as consumers and workers, Asian American women were prohibited from participating in these sites in either capacity. Historically associated with cheap and servile labor, they were deemed a degrading presence in retail shops (Belisle 2003, 70). As such, they were denied not only service and employment but also the opportunities for cultural appropriation and identity construction these sites proffered. But as we see in African American consumerism history, institutionalized racism and segregation policies limited but did not quash nonwhite women's consumerist practices. African American consumerism and anticonsumerism campaigns advocating "don't buy where you can't work" and "spend your money where you can work" were not always successful, but they nevertheless demonstrate the political uses of African American purchasing power to fight for social justice (see Friedman 1999; Glickman 2001).

Counterterrorist consumerism

Bush did not present the September 11 attacks as targeting the American family but rather the financial power of the United States. It was the economic explanation for the terrorist attacks that led Bush to announce, during his speech to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001, that “we will direct every resource at our command,” including “every financial influence . . . to the destruction and to the defeat of the global terror network” (2001f). And it was this economic explanation that underlay his call to Americans for their “continued participation and confidence in the American economy. Terrorists attacked a symbol of American prosperity; they did not touch its source . . . the hard work and creativity and enterprise of our people” (2001f). Following Bush, later exhortations by numerous politicians to get out and shop were part of a national consumerism campaign to publicly demonstrate U.S. market resilience.

“People died so you can exercise your freedom, so don’t stay at home and hide,” Giuliani was fond of repeating in his speeches promoting public displays of consumerism (quoted in *Los Angeles Times* 2001). The ethical framework within which Giuliani articulated consumerism campaigns functioned as a technology of power that recruited subjects to the mutually constitutive ideologies of market and moral economies.⁵ In other words, Americans were mobilized not only to publicly display their economic patriotism to the terrorists “who hate our freedoms,” as Bush first explained the attacks to Americans, but also to model their enduring allegiances to the American way of life. Giuliani articulated it as a moral and economic debt.

These campaigns connected the care of the nation to the care of the self through consumer culture. Fashion consumerism, then, is an act of self-empowerment that symbolically counters terrorists who apparently want Americans to “stay at home and hide.” By shopping for fashion, one engages in a style of dress and a style of democracy linked by the right to freedom of expression. Moreover, the prevailing imperative to get out and shop for fashion (rather than, say, shop online from home) ties fashion-as-a-right to the freedom of movement. The spate of news publications and television broadcasts in the years leading up to September

⁵ Perhaps nowhere are the entanglements of the market and moral economies more blatant than in the red, white, and blue limited-edition bibles that one Tennessee company rushed to produce—and quickly sold out of—after the attacks. These bibles can be found on Amazon at <http://www.amazon.com/Extreme-Word-Usa-Thomas-Nelson/dp/0718001532>.

11 about the vulnerability of American, European, and Middle Eastern shopping malls to suicide bombings and other terrorist attacks constructed the mall as the heart of American social, cultural, and consumerist life.⁶ For years after September 11, journalists and politicians alike gauged the United States' recovery by evaluating the busyness of malls. The symbolic construction of the mall also reinforced in the national consciousness the link between public consumerism and the freedom of movement. The fantasy of unfettered travel ingrained in mythological glorifications of colonial settlers and westward-roving frontiersmen is precisely the freedom denied to Afghan women who, in the words of a *San Francisco Chronicle* journalist, were "imprisoned by the veil" (Badkhen 2001, A1). By getting out and shopping for fashion, U.S. women engage in intertwined processes of national security and what Michel Foucault (1988) calls subjectivation, or the cultivation of the self. The intertwined processes of self-care and patriotism (nation-care) were woven into Fashion for America's limited edition T-shirts designed jointly by U.S. designers Tommy Hilfger and Donna Karan.

The Fashion for America campaign, with the support of the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA), *Vogue*, and New York Mayor Giuliani, was one of the largest and most organized post-September 11 consumerism campaigns. Designers participating in the effort made public service announcements and personal appearances at various apparel stores across the country, promoting both the campaign and the commemorative T-shirts. Like previous political apparel commodities, such as the suffragist fashion of the late nineteenth century and dresses throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries designed to show support for political candidates (the Ike dress, the Nixon dress, and, recently, the Obama dresses by Jean-Charles de Castelbajac and Sonia Rykiel), Fashion for America T-shirts organize political constituencies around fashion and style and link the body to the nation through the ethics of fashion and consumerism.⁷

The white crew-neck T-shirt featured a torn heart-shaped flag being sewn back together with a needle and thread, a visual metaphor for the fashion industry's role in stitching back the heart of the nation—as the economy was routinely described by Bush and by political and media

⁶ Kenneth Button cites over sixty instances of "terrorist or terrorist inspired attacks of various size at shopping malls since 1998" (2008, 128).

⁷ All these items have been collected and were on display at the Fashion & Politics exhibition at the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology (July 7 to November 7, 2009) in New York City.

pundits. In commodifying a national crisis, the T-shirt interpellates wearers and viewers into universalist neoliberal identifications: democracy with the marketization of the state and patriotism with consumerism. At a moment when neoliberalism was being strongly criticized by people across the political spectrum, these T-shirts rehabilitated it by refashioning its public perception.⁸ While the chicness of the T-shirt is indicated by its celebrity sponsorship and its sale at upmarket retail stores such as Barneys New York and Bergdorf Goodman, the T-shirt nonetheless invoked democratic allure in both its message and its medium. Consider that Donna Faircloth, CFDA communications director, promoted the Fashion for America T-shirt in this way: “This is not a couture dress; this is not a \$4,000 handbag. This is a T-shirt—a staple of American fashion” (quoted in Chabria 2001). Perhaps without intending to, Faircloth ascribes a cheap chic rationale to the designer T-shirt.

Cheap chic fashion for the Everywoman

The concept of cheap chic, the idea that fashion should be attainable at lower, mass-market price points and that stylishness is within anyone’s reach, has been an unstable but recurring precept of fashion since fashion’s inception in 1675. The formation of the couturieres’ trade guild in that year and their invention of the *manteau* (or *mantua*), a loose-fitting house-dress, which seventeenth-century Frenchwomen popularized as an early form of casual wear, inaugurated the sartorial trend of dressing down. “The *mantua* meant that for the first time a woman’s outfit did not function as an absolute class marker: from then on, it was far less easy to know at a glance who belonged where on the social spectrum” (DeJean 2005, 57). Since then, numerous sartorial eras and individual designers have been credited with the democratization of fashion. At the turn of the twentieth century, the industrialization of fashion, as a result of the invention of the sewing machine and standardized dress patterns, facilitated

⁸ Scholars, notably Lisa Duggan (2003) and David Harvey (2005), have written at length about “the crisis of neoliberalism,” which they mark as beginning in the 1990s. Evidence of the failures of neoliberalism in which the market could not guarantee the well-being of all citizens was apparent in the economic and financial crises in Latin America and Asia, the disintegration of the dot-com bubble in the United States, stagnant wages, and diminishing government and social services, including a broken health care system and a widening gap between rich and poor, as well as in broad resistance across the global South to the policies of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization.

the production of clothes for middle-class women's mass consumption.⁹ Charles Fredrick Worth and prestigious designers following him, such as Jeanne Paquin, Paul Poiret, and Madeleine Vionnet, popularized prêt-à-porter fashion, or ready-to-wear clothing (Lipovetsky 1994). Claudia Kidwell and Margaret Christman's (1974) description of the democratic effects of this moment of ready-to-wear fashion might be extended across multiple periods of cheap chic fashion: "ready-to-wear transformed clothing 'made for somebody' into clothing 'made for anybody' and finally into clothing 'made for everybody'" (Green 1994, 727). In 1926, *Vogue* declared Coco Chanel's simple long-sleeved black dress the epitome of "the modern democratic style" (quoted in Lipovetsky 1994, 60). Chanel famously declared, "I am no longer interested in dressing a few hundred women, private clients; I shall dress thousands of women" (quoted in English 2007, 28). For Gilles Lipovetsky, post-World War II America was exemplary of "democratic revolution" (1994, 31) in ready-to-wear fashion. "The rise in standards of living, the cult of well-being, leisure, and instant happiness . . . led to the ultimate stage in the legitimizing and democratizing of enthusiasm for fashion" (95). Others point to Mary Quant's invention of the miniskirt in the 1960s as a key moment in fashion's democratization; the low aesthetic sensibilities of go-go dancers were incorporated into high-fashion designs and then produced for mass consumption. The antifashion ethos of hippies, punks, neopunks, and cyberpunks in the 1970s and 1980s that leaked into fashion's mainstream through designers such as Yves Saint Laurent marks another moment of fashion's democratization (Steele 1997). So-called masstige partnerships (in which a celebrity or a celebrity designer teams up with a mass-market retailer to create a designer collection) such as Jaclyn Smith for Kmart in 1985, Martha Stewart for Kmart in 1997, and Mossimo for Target in 2000 are also instances of cheap chic business strategies that predate the post-September 11 era of cheap chic.

What is distinct about the post-September 11 era of cheap chic fashion is the ways in which advertisers, retailers, and designers seized the pervasive language of equality and democracy to assert not simply fashion's democratization or fashion as a material sign of democracy but the demo-

⁹ While middle-class women "declared this transition to be 'democratic' . . . and celebrated it as 'egalitarian,' as opposed to elite consumption," Nan Enstad points out in her groundbreaking study of working women at the turn of the twentieth century that "the 'democratization of fashion' was not, in fact, to extend to the working class" (1999, 24, 26). "The notion of taste served to maintain distinction even after industrialization reduced the extreme differences in the types of fabrics and styles between classes" (31).

cratic right to fashion for everyday Americans. Unlike the couture dress or the \$4,000 handbag, the Fashion for America insignia T-shirt was a must-have piece in American wardrobes that was also democratically priced at \$22.50. Here, it is not just the case that frivolous fashion is the patriotic symbol of the United States, as one *Salon* journalist would have it (J. Brown 2001); rather, the financially attainable T-shirt symbolizes the essential American style of democracy.

But this is no ordinary T-shirt. The designer T-shirt enables the consumer to care for the nation (proceeds from the sales were donated to the Twin Towers Fund, which provides financial assistance to family beneficiaries of uniformed and rescue workers who lost their lives in the attacks) while caring for the self with fashionable commodities. Through these T-shirts, self-empowerment and patriotism are imagined to have no economic barriers (unlike the aforementioned couture dress and \$4,000 handbag).

In 2003, Isaac Mizrahi, in collaboration with the retail giant Target, developed a cheap chic collection that resonated with post-September 11 consumer values. Appropriating a philosophy created to encourage the development of products that were accessible to elderly and disabled people, the collection was marketed under the umbrella label Design for All. Other designers and retailers followed: celebrated designers Doo-ri Chung, Thakoon Panichgul, and Phillip Lim, among others, redesigned the classic white shirt for the U.S. mass sportswear retailer Gap.¹⁰ Cynthia Rowley, Proenza Schouler, Zac Posen, and Jovovich-Hawk have had collections at Target; Karl Lagerfeld, Stella McCartney, Roberto Cavalli, and Madonna designed for H&M, the trendy Swedish discount chain. Vivienne Westwood and Alice + Olivia have partnered with NineWest and Payless ShoeSource, respectively. Oscar de la Renta and Elie Tahari have partnerships with Macy's. And the list goes on. In the marketing campaigns of these collaborations, a new fashion subject emerged.

Rather than the skinny, long-limbed girl whose substantial social and economic capital elevated her above the ground-level concerns of under- and middle-class Americans, cheap chic fashion idealizes the Everywoman. While inspired, at least putatively, by the media's post-September 11 valorization of everyday U.S. heroes (specifically, the passengers on each of the four hijacked airplanes and the men and women who worked as firefighters and volunteers at Ground Zero), this Everywoman came to fashion consciousness as a consequence of the destabilization of class identity

¹⁰ This effort was part of the CFDA-*Vogue* fund initiative that provides financial support and professional mentorship to emerging designers.

in a period of late capitalism. Whereas the style and cut of one's dress may once have signified and delineated class identifications, alternative consumer sites such as factory outlet malls and cheap chic retailers, as Marianne Conroy observes, enable women to perform "class positions beyond their actual income levels" (1998, 64). Thus, cheap chic fashion empowers the Everywoman to achieve the American dream of upward social mobility.

In an interview with *Today Show* host Matt Lauer about her cheap chic label, Bitten, Sarah Jessica Parker explained, "What appealed to me about it was the idea of making fashion accessible to *all* women in this country despite their economic status, their age, their size, their ethnic background, their shape, their . . . anything" (in Lauer 2007). In a similar vein, Mizrahi remarked that his exclusive collection at Target "will offer affordable luxury for every woman, everywhere" (*Retail Merchandiser* 2003). Cheap chic fashion, its proponents asserted, enabled women to participate in the freedoms of self-expression that are intrinsic to liberal subjectivity. Consider, for example, the tagline for Parker's Bitten label, which expressly links fashion to neoliberal democratic rights: "It is every woman's inalienable right to have a pulled-together stylish, confident wardrobe with money left over to live. Get Bitten." (Accordingly, no single Bitten item costs more than \$19.98, and the size chart generously ranges from 0 to 22.)¹¹ In an interview with *Glamour* magazine, Parker said of her cheap chic clothing label, "It's a way of giving women without financial means access to good, simple, well-made clothes to feel proud of" (in Morris 2007). Consider, too, world-renowned interior designer Philippe Starck's democratic formulation of his partnership with Target. An April 2002 press release announcing the partnership includes Starck's statement that "working with Target has helped me to fulfill a dream that I've held all my life. . . . My goal in this democratization of design is to make possible the most joyful and exciting things and experiences for the maximum number of people. Today, we don't need more design, more pretensions—we need more happiness and more magic available to everyone" (quoted in Rowley 2003, 37). The real value of cheap chic commodities, then, lies in the democratic possibilities they provide for the improvement of the Everywoman's self and life in the form of increased happiness,

¹¹ The Bitten Web page on the Steve & Barry's Web site (<http://www.steveandbarrys.com/>) has been deactivated since the company closed its stores and filed for bankruptcy in 2008. Information about Bitten can still be located on blogs, including Blogher.com (<http://www.blogher.com/node/21239>) and the *Wall Street Journal* law blog (<http://blogs.wsj.com/law/2008/07/09/bankruptcy-wave-topples-steve-barrys/>).

confidence, and pride. Here again, we see the neoliberal tripartite configuration of democracy, self-empowerment, and fashion that is characteristic of the post–September 11 “regime of value” (Appadurai 1986, 4).

It is worth noting that the Everywoman figure is constructed at the limits of and in different relations to the figures of the burqa-clad Afghan woman and the exceptional designer. In their dismissal of the particularities of economic status, age, size, ethnicity, and shape, Mizrahi and Parker imagine a universal and recognizably multicultural cheap chic subject. However, the evacuation of difference does not produce sartorial social justice but rather evinces the “universal empty point” that Nirmal Puwar, following Slavoj Žižek, ascribes to the privileged space of whiteness in multicultural productions (2002, 76). Consider, for example, that at the peak of the cheap chic moment, the burqa shifted “from shock to chic,” as McLarney puts it, and “emerged on Paris runways and later that year in *Vogue* fashion spreads photographed by the venerable . . . Irving Penn, and modeled by girl-of-the-moment Gemma Ward” (2009, 2). The burqa’s difference is at once attenuated and legitimated by the young, white Australian model’s body within the context of neoliberal multicultural capitalism. This is possible, as Puwar rightly insists in a different but related context, because “white female bodies occupy the universal empty point which remains racially unmarked. . . . [Thus] they can play with the assigned particularity of ethnicized” dress without suffering “the violence of revulsion” (2002, 76, 74). Fashion’s multicultural embrace of the burqa occludes the symbolic and physical violence burqa-clad Muslim women suffer. Likewise cheap chic’s universalism masks hierarchized differences of race, class, and market roles.

The Everywoman subject that cheap chic fashion extols is an abstraction—a homogenized mass consumer—but the real agent of democracy is the designer. As one *Glamour* journalist remarks about Parker, “it’s not what you’d expect from Carrie Bradshaw [the television role that made Parker a household name] or a red-carpet regular who was given the CFDA’s Fashion Icon award in 2004. But then Sarah Jessica Parker is anything but typical, even when she’s dressed like the girl next door” (Morris 2007). The hierarchal relationship between the designer agent and the passive shopper, between political producer and apolitical consumer, is unchanged even in a period of fashion’s radical democratization.

The inclusive neoliberal multicultural language of cheap chic fashion (“accessible to *all* women . . . despite their . . . anything”; Lauer 2007) also obfuscates the continued logic and function of race and class difference in gender formations and in global capitalism. Some of the hidden costs of cheap chic have been well documented in the popular press. These

include labor and environmental violations that disproportionately affect women and ecosystems in the global South (Ramesh 2006; Carter 2008). Moreover, casual slurs against cheap chic by fashion elites stigmatize cheap chic fashion and mass modes of consumption, marking them with inferred social and class differences. As Gucci creative director Frida Giannini confessed to *Harper's Bazaar*, she “once . . . ventured into the outer orbit of cheap fashion.” But when her colleagues discovered that her new dress was from H&M, Giannini “was so mortified” that she gave her dress away (Martin 2008, 145). In the same issue, another article cautions that “not everyone is born with the innate talent . . . to know which cheapo find is just the thing to set a fancy piece fashionably aflame” (D’Souza 2008, 103). And not long after September 11, when cheap chic exploded onto the fashion scene, some, like fashion editor Michelle Lee, dismissed it as McFashion, the sartorial equivalent of McDonald’s fast food. Her book *Fashion Victim* is a confusing jumble of mocking and scathing denunciations of all fashion lovers, but her vitriol for “fashion illiterate” McFashion consumers who tend toward the “tacky” is especially intense (2003, 67, 81).

Despite Lee’s brash and uncritical classism, her perspective is constructive because it illustrates the changing ethical politics of fashion. Such derision toward cheap chic and the 2008 bankruptcy of the cheap chic powerhouse retailer Steve & Barry’s (which housed Parker’s Bitten collection) mark a shift in cheap chic’s appeal and political power. By way of conclusion, I offer a brief sketch of the contours of fashion’s new ethical politics and consider how the relationships between the economies of morality and the market have been recalibrated to fit this new sartorial ethical landscape.

Democratization of fashion 2.0

As of this writing, the discursive link between cheap chic fashion and democracy has been disrupted by the global economic crisis, widespread under- and unemployment, and the mainstreaming of ecoconsciousness, due in large part to Al Gore’s critically acclaimed documentary on global warming, *An Inconvenient Truth*. Fashion consumerism campaigns promote organic materials and sustainable methods. The recessionary ethics of fashion dictate that consumers pay more, not less, for their fashions by advocating the environmental and the economic virtues of purchasing so-called investment pieces. Lee’s rationalization is representative of this current and burgeoning ethical sartorial system: “Just as too much McDonald’s gradually puts a choke hold on our arteries, too much McFashion

progressively narrows our channels of creativity and individuality. And our unhealthy consumption of it has begun to take its toll" (2003, 83–84). Whereas just a few years ago fashion in general and cheap chic specifically were celebrated tools for the distribution of democratic rights to self-expression and self-determination, the mass distribution and consumption of fashion today are not understood as contributing to the care of the self or the nation. To the contrary, mass fashion is unhealthy for both.

Moreover, cheap chic is imagined as detrimental to the strength of the national economy. The CFDA-*Vogue* consumerism campaign called Fashion's Night Out (launched on September 10, 2009, in fourteen fashion capitals around the world) shares the same goals as the Fashion for America campaign (promote retail, restore consumer confidence, and celebrate fashion), yet their economic-ethical objectives are quite different. Promoting Fashion's Night Out, designer Vera Wang pronounced, "If people don't shop, people lose their jobs" (Blasberg 2009, 406). The ethical justification for Fashion's Night Out obscures the industry's growing concerns about the loss of luxury fashion profits because of recession-wary shoppers' en masse turn to alternative modes of consumerism (eBay, online discount sites such as Outnet.com, and cheap chic retailers). So-called recessionistas have forced luxury retailers to severely mark down their prices: in 2008 and 2009, it was not unusual to see price tags at upmarket retailers such as Vera Wang, Phillip Lim, and Costume National in the tony Manhattan shopping district of Soho marked down by 60, 70, and, at Marc Jacobs, 90 percent. Discounts like these led to Wintour's recent ill-advised proposal to create "a committee that would make ground rules for retailers when the discounting starts, and then all the retailers can agree to it" (Odell 2009). Such a committee is illegal, but Wintour's suggestion clearly demonstrates the industry's retreat from cheap chic.

In light of the current consumerist moment, has this era of the democratization of fashion ended? Though fashion stalwarts like Wintour might be nostalgic for a time before democratization became a buzzword in fashion discourse, a new phase of democratization has just emerged from the groundswell of Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs, video sharing, and mobile device applications (also called apps). These technologies have pried open even further the world of fashion, presumably enabling anyone with a computer and an Internet connection to access as well as participate in the production, consumption, and circulation of not only fashion objects and images but fashion knowledge as well. And indeed, hundreds of bloggers as young as twelve years old and living well outside the traditional centers of Western fashion (in midwestern U.S. suburbs, the Philippines, and South Africa, among many other nontraditional fash-

ion sites) are deftly employing these digital technologies to become style icons and fashion authorities. The digital phase of democratization is linked, as *New York Times* fashion writer Eric Wilson observes, to the earlier phase of cheap chic: blogs are “in a sense democratizing the coverage of style, much as designers and retailers—with lower priced fast-fashion collections—have democratized fashion itself” (2009, 14).

While the digital era of fashion’s democratization is not without its problems (particularly as it integrates more and more with neoliberal capitalist procedures and logics of unregulated access, choice, and individualism), the expansion of democratic discourses in relation to fashion illustrates a broader point implied throughout this essay. Fashion is not outside of politics; on the contrary, it constitutes a key horizon along which global and national political economies are constructed and biopolitics and geopolitics are entwined.

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