

# Book review on northern ladies civil war fashions by sarah e mitchell in the time...

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Northern ladies civil war Fashions is a book by Sarah E. Mitchell that highlights on the clothing that was worn by women in the south during the civil wars. The civil wars lasted a period of four years from 1861-1865. This is a historical analysis of how far the ladies fashion has come from. It serves as a reminder that there were times when ladies were limited in terms of what to wear and the design to adopt. Womanhood was not only displayed by nature but also the clothing the women adopted. The book also highlights the fact that just like today where there are clothing for certain occasions, profession, class and time, women during the civil wars had to dress accordingly. A comparison has been made on life before the civil war and how the war imparted on the dressing that was later adopted by the women.

The civil war has been considered to have brought about transformation among women in almost all spheres of their lives. It was a time of discovery and realization as they were exposed to numerous opportunities. One feature about the civil war is that men were absent in the homes and were busy fighting. This put women in challenging situations where they had to adopt roles that were perceived to be of men. However, the man were absent and life had to move on, they could not sit there hungry and incapacitated simply because there were no men. They had to do all they could to ensure life was rolling. This was a time when some of them were elevated to various leadership positions and careers. In fact, it was an advantage to some of them who had never handled money. As the men fought, there were other industrial sectors than needed employees. The women had to take up the positions and serve in the best way they could.

This did not only bring change to their lifestyles but also to their wardrobes. They discovered that they had extra cash to buy a variety. However, because of the culture, they were limited on the designs and fashions of clothes they were to wear. The hoop skirt was one of the most common dressings during the civil war. The design was adopted considering the thin waistline that was required and free towards the hips and the legs (Mitchell, 22). Making the skirt required a large piece of material, after fitting the waistline, the rest of the clothing was made into gathers or left free to reveal true womanhood. The hoop skirt was made of about 5 yards of fabric to make a Victorian hoop skirt. However, as the civil wars intensified the company supplying the fabrics had to be closed down. This worked out for the fashion industry, as women had to adopt smaller clothes to save on the fabric.

The main colors of the time were purple for the royal class, white for special occasions like church and any other religious activities, brown for home use and other casual activities and black mostly for official duties. Women had clothes they wore on regular normal days and special ones for visiting special places such as towns. Jewelers were also worn on special occasions especially when going to parties. This were however not to be worn during official duties and church. Women had to be modest when carrying out their official responsibilities to ensure that they did not attract the attention of men. The dress code was stricter for the nurses who were required to wear clothes that would completely cover them including the hair. This was because of their crucial responsibility of serving in hospitals where they were

not only to remain focused on their jobs but also not distract doctors and patients.

The colors that women wore were influenced by nature; this is the reason why most of their fabric had floral patterns and natural colors. They were to be careful in choosing colors to ensure that they rhymed with their skin color as well as other clothing. It was also important for the women to wear and carry gloves whenever they went for functions such as church and parties. The gloves protected the women and only removed when eating. They were part of women wears just like, hats, shawl and bonnet. The gloves extended to the wrist and made the women to be completely covered. Jeweled jewelry worn during the civil war was mainly to remember loved ones who were separated by distance. To keep the relationships close, the jewelry were made of hair of the person to be remembered. This was considered to be the most intimate way of remembering them.

Shoes for the women were mainly in boot form with a smaller heel, they were comfortable for both day and evening times (Mitchell, 15). They were lighter in weight and made it flexible for the women to move around. Unlike today where ladies have to keep changing shoes depending on the occasion and weather, civil war shoes were designed for all occasions and weather, they were worn with long stockings that went past the knee. They also wore undergarments, which included petticoats and drawers and long undershirts. These were required to make them comfortable as they performed their duties. The skirts were also fitted with suspenders to ensure comfort and

firmness. Bags, purses and handkerchief were also part of the dressing, which came in various designs and shape.

Ladies fashion kept changing as the civil war proceeded. This was because of the new responsibilities that women adopted. Women changed their wardrobe according to their class and position held. Irrespective of their days activities, Victorian women had at least three different settings of clothes for the day, one was to be worn at daytime, another during the evening and especially when they had parties and another for the night. Their clothing were designed to enhance comfortably and flexibility. They were also to wear protective clothing such as aprons and hoods. This protected them from dirt and harsh climatic conditions (Mitchell, 10). The clothing ensured that they maintained their feminine beauty despite their responsibilities. It was also to ensure focus at their duties. Shorter clothes were never worn when they performed official responsibilities, as this would deviate the attention of the men who were working with them and probably tempt them into immorality. Their hairstyles had to be kept simple and covered when attending to certain duties. Nursing being a crucial responsibility during the civil wars, dress code for the women was not something taken for granted. Their dressing had to reflect their integrity and seriousness towards their careers.

## **Works cited**

Mitchell, Sarah. Northern ladies' Civil War fashions, 1861-1865. New York: Sarah E. Mitchell, 2010.

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