

Women's Wear Daily as a primary source for interdisciplinary research – Case study

Overview

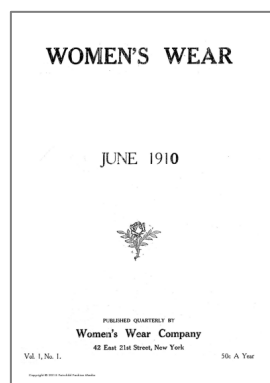
Since its founding in 1910, *Women's Wear Daily* has documented the fashion industry as a system shaped by economics, politics, labor and culture. What began as a business to business trade paper developed into a long running record of how clothing, retail and visual culture respond to social change. Because *WWD* reports contemporaneously on events as they unfold, it functions as a primary source for research across history, business, media studies, visual culture and the arts.

The following case studies were presented during a CHOICE-sponsored webinar hosted by Clarivate, featuring Tonya Blazio-Licorish, Archives Editor at Penske Media Corporation, and Chris Cotton, Senior Manager for Product Management at Clarivate.

Case study 1 – *WWD* documenting culture, commerce and change

Presented by: Tonya Blazio-Licorish

WWD's inaugural issue established its purpose "to cover the factors between the mill and the merchant," positioning fashion as an industrial and economic force rather than a lifestyle concern.



Women's Wear; New York Vol. 1, Iss. 1, (Jun 1, 1910).

All images copyright Fairchild Archive/*WWD*/Penske Media.

Key themes

- Fashion as business intelligence
- Wartime regulation and material scarcity
- Protest movements and cultural expression
- Politics, trade and global commerce

Representative sources

- [Front page. \(1910\)](#). *Women's Wear*, 1(1), 1.
- Howell, C. (1969). [Woodstock in Washington](#). *Women's Wear Daily*, 119(96), 4-5.
- Ellis, K. (2008). [Sourcing horizons: Presidential race steers congressional trade agenda](#). *WWD*, 195(58), 1.

These articles show how *WWD* contextualized events such as war, protest and elections through their impact on industry practices, consumer behavior and visual culture. Rather than treating social movements as abstract developments, *WWD* traced how policy and activism altered production, dress and representation in real time.

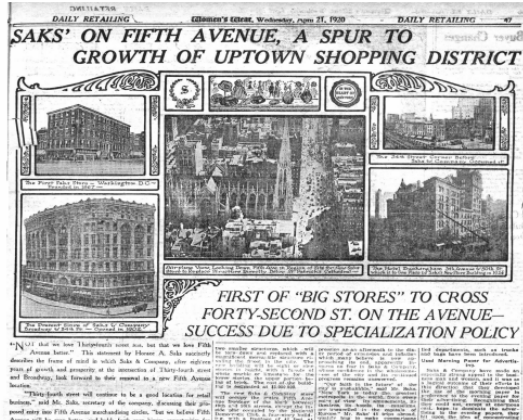
Teaching idea

Ask students to select a major historical event (for example, wartime rationing or a large-scale protest) and analyze how *WWD* reported on it compared with a general newspaper published the same year.

Case study 2 – Saks Fifth Avenue: evolution and restructuring 2

Presented by: Tonya Blazio-Licorish

WWD has chronicled Saks Fifth Avenue from its early twentieth-century flagship to its twenty-first-century restructuring. Coverage provides a longitudinal view of luxury retail as both an urban and financial enterprise.



Women's Wear; New York Vol. 20, Iss. 93, (Apr 21, 1920).

All images copyright Fairchild Archive/WWD/Penske Media.

Key themes

- Urban development and retail geography
- Brand identity and merchandising strategy
- Capital investment and ownership change
- Legacy retail in periods of disruption

Representative sources

- [Saks' on Fifth Avenue, a spur to growth of uptown shopping](#). (1920). *Women's Wear*, 20(93), 47.
- Rutberg, S. (1990). [Saks Fifth Avenue: Investcorp gets Saks for \\$1.5B: A new era begins](#). *WWD*, 159(82), 1, 6.

Across decades, WWD documented Saks' transition from architectural landmark to global luxury brand and, more recently, its restructuring under Saks Global. This sustained coverage supports research into retail economics, real estate, consumer behavior and the shifting meaning of luxury.

Teaching idea

Have students build a timeline using WWD articles from different decades to track how Saks' business strategy, language and visual presentation change over time. The assignment supports discussion of legacy retail, urban development and the shifting meaning of luxury.

Case study 3 – Josephine Baker and the intersection of arts, culture and fashion

Presented by: Tonya Blazio-Licorish

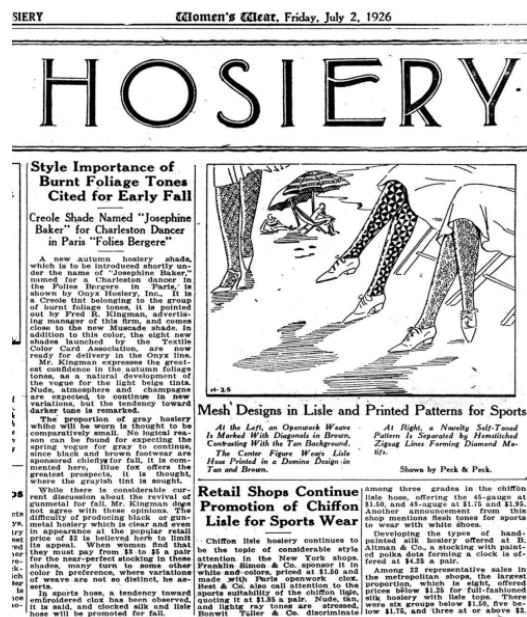
WWD's coverage of Josephine Baker offers a detailed record of how performance, celebrity and fashion intersected during the Jazz Age and beyond. The publication followed Baker from early stage appearances to her later career, treating her as both cultural figure and fashion influence.

Key themes

- Celebrity branding before the modern influencer economy
- Black artistry and global fashion influence
- Performance, costume and visual identity
- Representation and cultural exchange

Representative sources

- [Hosiery: Style importance of burnt foliage tones cited for early fall.](#) (1926). *Women's Wear*, 32(154), 26.
- Dryansky, G. Y. (1973). [Eye® View: Baker's back again.](#) *Women's Wear Daily*, 127(126), 12.



Women's Wear; New York Vol. 32, Iss. 154, (Jul 2, 1926)
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WWD documented Baker's wardrobe, beauty practices and commercial collaborations, offering insight into how she shaped fashion aesthetics while navigating racialized and gendered expectations. These materials support research in fashion studies, performance studies, Black history and media history.

Teaching idea

Assign students a WWD article on Josephine Baker alongside a modern profile of a contemporary celebrity or influencer. Ask them to compare how fashion media constructs identity, authority and commercial value across different historical periods.

Visual culture across disciplines – *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as a recurring aesthetic

Presented by: Chris Cotton

WWD coverage demonstrates how literary imagery moves across retail, fashion marketing and performance over time.

Fashion and retail (WWD)

- **1923:** [Store promotion: Book characters appear lifelike in display: Nurse from "Alice in Wonderland".](#) *Women's Wear*; New York Vol. 27, Iss. 127, (Dec 1, 1923).
- **1947:** [Children's, girls', teen wear: "Alice in Wonderland" inspirational for children's wear promotions.](#) *Women's Wear Daily*; New York Vol. 74, Iss. 70, (Apr 9, 1947): 23.
- **1973:** [Arts & pleasures: "Alice" returns, courtesy of the Mad Hatter.](#) Sharp, Christopher. *Women's Wear Daily*; New York Vol. 126, Iss. 63, (Mar 30, 1973).
- **2024:** [Cannes Film Festival preview: Designers create fairy tale looks for amfAR Gala.](#) Socha, Miles. WWD; Los Angeles (May 15, 2024).



Characters from Juvenile Literature in a Book Display at Macy's

Book Characters Appear Lifelike in Display

Women's Wear; New York Vol. 27, Iss. 127, (Dec 1, 1923):
All images copyright Fairchild Archive/WWD/Penske Media

Teaching idea

Ask students to identify a recurring cultural reference that appears multiple times in *Women's Wear Daily* across decades, such as a literary work, film, performer or theatrical production, and trace how it is adapted for different contexts (retail promotion, fashion design, performance or celebrity culture).

About the presenter: Tonya Blazio-Licorish



Tonya Blazio-Licorish is Archives Editor at Penske Media Corporation and a visual culture historian whose work focuses on archival storytelling and fashion history. With more than fifteen years in the creative industries, she approaches *Women's Wear Daily* through an interdisciplinary lens connecting fashion, culture, business, and society. She is the co-author of *Black in Fashion: 100 Years of Style, Influence, and Culture* (2024) and curator of the Fairchild Fashion Museum.

Access

The [Women's Wear Daily Archive](#) is available in [Fashion Studies Collection](#), part of [ProQuest One Visual Arts & Design](#), with full page, cover to cover page images preserved from 1910 to the present.