

turn of the century dresses

Turn of the Century Dresses: A Glimpse into Vintage Elegance

turn of the century dresses evoke images of a fascinating era when fashion was undergoing a significant transformation. Spanning roughly from the late 1800s to the early 1900s, this period witnessed the transition from the rigid Victorian styles into more fluid and comfortable silhouettes of the Edwardian age. These dresses are not only a testament to the craftsmanship of the time but also reflect the social and cultural shifts that influenced women's fashion. Whether you're a vintage fashion enthusiast, a history buff, or simply curious about how style evolved, exploring turn of the century dresses offers a captivating window into the past.

The Historical Context of Turn of the Century Dresses

Understanding the historical backdrop is essential to fully appreciate the charm and complexity of turn of the century dresses. The late 19th century was marked by strict societal norms, especially concerning women's roles and appearances. Clothing was elaborate, structured, and often restrictive, embodying the ideals of modesty and femininity.

From Victorian to Edwardian: Fashion Evolves

During the Victorian era, dresses were characterized by tight corsets, voluminous skirts supported by crinolines or bustles, and high collars. By the turn of the century, however, fashion began to lean towards softer lines and greater freedom of movement. The Edwardian period introduced the iconic S-bend corset, which created a distinctive silhouette with a pronounced forward-leaning posture.

This era also saw the rise of the tea gown, a more relaxed style worn in informal settings at home, often featuring delicate lace and lighter fabrics. The transition from heavy, dark fabrics to lighter materials like muslin and silk highlighted a shift in both aesthetic preferences and technological advancements in textile production.

Key Features of Turn of the Century Dresses

Turn of the century dresses are distinct for their intricate details and unique construction techniques. Here are some defining elements that set them apart:

Silhouettes and Structure

The silhouette of dresses from this period was characterized by a narrow waist, often achieved through corsetry, and a full bust and hips. The S-curve shape was popular, created by corsets pushing the chest forward and hips back. Dresses typically featured high necklines and long sleeves,

reflecting the modesty standards of the time.

Fabrics and Embellishments

Common fabrics included silk, satin, lace, and fine cotton. Embellishments played a vital role in the aesthetic appeal of these dresses—intricate beadwork, embroidery, and lace inserts were frequently used to add texture and visual interest. Ruffles, pleats, and flounces provided movement and feminine flair.

Color Palette

While the Victorian era favored darker and more somber colors, turn of the century dresses began embracing softer pastel tones, creams, and whites, especially for daywear. Evening gowns were often made in richer hues such as deep blues, purples, and blacks, sometimes accented with metallic threads or jewels.

Iconic Styles and Dress Types

During this transitional period, several dress styles came into vogue, each serving different functions and occasions.

The Tea Gown

Designed for informal home entertaining, tea gowns were less structured, made from lighter materials, and often adorned with lace and ribbons. They reflected a move towards comfort without sacrificing elegance.

The Walking Dress

These dresses were practical yet stylish, tailored for outdoor activities like promenading in parks or attending social events. They typically featured sturdier fabrics and simpler designs compared to evening wear but still maintained refined detailing.

Evening Gowns

Evening wear of the era was more elaborate, often featuring low necklines, luxurious fabrics, and dramatic embellishments. These dresses were designed to impress and showcase the wearer's status and taste.

How Turn of the Century Dresses Influence Modern Fashion

The legacy of turn of the century dresses can still be seen in contemporary fashion, where designers often draw inspiration from vintage silhouettes, fabrics, and detailing.

Revival of Vintage Silhouettes

Modern fashion frequently revisits the hourglass shape popularized during this time, with corset-inspired tops and cinched waists making comebacks in various collections. The romanticism of lace, embroidery, and delicate fabrics remains a staple for evening and bridal wear.

Sustainable and Ethical Fashion Movements

Interest in vintage and antique clothing aligns with the growing trend toward sustainable fashion. Turn of the century dresses, with their high-quality materials and craftsmanship, exemplify timeless pieces that can be cherished and preserved rather than discarded.

Tips for Collecting and Styling Turn of the Century Dresses Today

For those interested in incorporating pieces from this era into their wardrobe or collection, certain considerations can enhance the experience.

Authenticity and Preservation

When collecting vintage dresses, it's crucial to verify authenticity. Look for details like fabric type, stitching techniques, and labels or markings that date the piece. Proper preservation involves storing dresses in acid-free tissue paper, avoiding direct sunlight, and maintaining stable humidity levels to prevent fabric deterioration.

Styling Ideas

Incorporating turn of the century dresses into modern fashion can be both fun and elegant. Pair a lace tea gown with contemporary accessories like minimalist jewelry or a structured handbag for a balanced look. For evening events, a vintage-inspired silhouette can be complemented with sleek hair and modern makeup to create a timeless yet fresh appearance.

Where to Find Turn of the Century Dresses

Locating authentic turn of the century dresses can be a rewarding hunt.

- **Antique Shops and Estate Sales:** These venues often hold genuine vintage clothing with historical provenance.
- **Specialized Vintage Boutiques:** Shops focusing on early 20th-century fashion may offer carefully curated selections.
- **Online Marketplaces:** Websites like Etsy and eBay can be good sources, but always check seller reviews and request detailed photos.
- **Museum Shops and Reproductions:** Some museums offer high-quality replicas for enthusiasts who want the look without the fragility of originals.

Exploring these options allows fashion lovers to connect with the past and appreciate the artistry behind turn of the century dresses.

Fashion history is a tapestry woven with stories of changing tastes, cultural shifts, and technological advances. Turn of the century dresses stand out as exquisite examples of this evolution, blending Victorian formality with the emerging modern sensibilities of the 20th century. Whether admired as collector's items or sources of inspiration, these dresses continue to captivate with their delicate beauty and rich heritage.

Frequently Asked Questions

What time period does 'turn of the century dresses' refer to?

'Turn of the century dresses' typically refer to fashion styles from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, around the 1890s to the 1910s.

What are the key features of turn of the century dresses?

Turn of the century dresses often feature high necklines, long sleeves, corseted waists, full skirts, and intricate lace or embroidery details.

What fabrics were commonly used for turn of the century dresses?

Common fabrics included silk, cotton, wool, and lace, frequently adorned with embellishments like beads, ribbons, and embroidery.

How did turn of the century dresses reflect social status?

The complexity, quality of fabric, and decoration of the dresses often indicated the wearer's social status, with wealthier women wearing more elaborate and finely made gowns.

What influence did the Art Nouveau movement have on turn of the century dress designs?

Art Nouveau influenced dress designs with flowing lines, natural motifs, and an emphasis on elegance and artistic detail in trims and fabric patterns.

How did women's fashion evolve after the turn of the century?

After the turn of the century, women's fashion gradually moved towards simpler, more practical styles, culminating in the flapper dresses of the 1920s which emphasized freedom of movement.

Where can one find authentic or replica turn of the century dresses today?

Authentic or replica turn of the century dresses can be found in vintage clothing stores, costume shops, specialized online retailers, and museums with historical fashion collections.

Additional Resources

Turn of the Century Dresses: A Detailed Exploration of Fashion at the Dawn of the 20th Century

Turn of the century dresses encapsulate a fascinating period in fashion history, marking the transition from the elaborate Victorian and Edwardian styles to the more modern silhouettes that emerged in the early 1900s. This era, roughly spanning the late 1890s through the 1910s, reflects not only changes in aesthetic preferences but also broader social and technological shifts. Analyzing turn of the century dresses offers valuable insights into the cultural dynamics of the time and the evolution of women's fashion.

The Historical Context of Turn of the Century Dresses

The term "turn of the century" refers to the cusp between the 19th and 20th centuries, a time characterized by rapid industrialization, urbanization, and social reform. Fashion, as a cultural artifact, mirrors these transformations. Women's clothing styles from this period reveal the intersection of traditional values and emerging modernity. The dresses of this era were influenced by shifting ideals of femininity, changing social roles, and advancements in textile manufacturing.

During the late Victorian period, dresses were typically highly structured with corsets shaping an hourglass figure. By the early 1900s, however, there was a gradual move towards lighter fabrics and less restrictive designs, reflecting women's increasing participation in public life and physical activities. The turn of the century dresses symbolize this delicate balance between decorum and liberation.

Key Features of Turn of the Century Dresses

Turn of the century dresses are distinguished by several hallmark characteristics that set them apart from other historical fashion periods:

Silhouettes and Shape

The silhouette of turn of the century dresses evolved from the tightly cinched waists and full skirts of the late 19th century to the “S-bend” corset shape popularized around 1900. This corset created a distinctive profile where the bust was pushed forward and the hips thrust back, producing an exaggerated posture often described as the Gibson Girl look. This silhouette emphasized an elongated torso and a narrow waist.

As the decade progressed, the silhouette softened. By the 1910s, dresses exhibited a straighter cut with higher waistlines, foreshadowing the flapper styles of the 1920s. This shift was partly due to changing social attitudes and the practical needs of women who were increasingly active outside the home.

Fabric and Materials

Textiles used in turn of the century dresses ranged from luxurious silks and satins to more accessible cottons and linens. Lace and embroidery were prevalent, often used to embellish bodices, sleeves, and collars. The introduction of synthetic dyes and mass-produced fabrics made colorful, patterned materials more widely available.

Lightweight fabrics such as voile and organdy became popular for summer dresses, reflecting a trend toward comfort and breathability. The choice of fabric often indicated the wearer’s social status, with wealthier women favoring intricate lace overlays and fine silks.

Decoration and Embellishments

Decoration played a crucial role in the aesthetic of turn of the century dresses. Ruffles, pleats, and flounces added volume and texture, while elaborate trims—such as ribbons, bows, and beading—highlighted femininity. High necklines adorned with lace collars were fashionable, particularly for daywear, while evening dresses often featured lower necklines and more elaborate ornamentation.

The attention to detail in embellishments was a testament to the craftsmanship of the era, as many garments were hand-sewn or featured hand-applied decorations before the widespread use of sewing machines.

Comparisons with Other Historical Fashion Eras

Understanding turn of the century dresses requires situating them within the broader continuum of fashion history. Compared to Victorian dresses, which were characterized by heavy fabrics and voluminous skirts supported by crinolines and bustles, turn of the century dresses presented a more refined and delicate aesthetic. The S-bend silhouette diverged sharply from the hourglass formality of the previous decades.

When contrasted with the later 1920s flapper dresses, turn of the century styles appear more structured and conservative. The early 1900s still emphasized modesty, with high collars and long sleeves dominating. However, the gradual simplification of dress shapes and the move toward lighter fabrics signaled the impending revolution in women's fashion that would define the Jazz Age.

Impact of Technological Advances

Technological innovations had a significant impact on the production and design of turn of the century dresses. The sewing machine became more widespread and efficient, allowing for faster garment construction and more intricate designs. The development of new textile machinery enabled mass production of fabrics that were previously difficult or expensive to create.

Additionally, the rise of department stores and mail-order catalogs broadened access to fashionable clothing for the middle classes, democratizing style to some extent. Turn of the century dresses thus represent a pivotal moment when fashion moved beyond the exclusive domain of the aristocracy to include a wider audience.

Social and Cultural Significance

Fashion during the turn of the century was deeply intertwined with social identity and gender roles. The dresses of this era reflected prevailing notions of femininity, which emphasized grace, delicacy, and decorum. The corseted silhouette was both a symbol of beauty and a literal constraint, underscoring women's complex relationship with societal expectations.

At the same time, subtle changes in dress design paralleled the early feminist movements. Women's increasing participation in education, work, and sports necessitated more practical clothing options, leading to simpler cuts and lighter fabrics. Turn of the century dresses thus capture the tension between tradition and progress in gender dynamics.

Influence on Contemporary Fashion

Modern designers frequently draw inspiration from turn of the century dresses, incorporating elements such as lace detailing, high necklines, and structured bodices into contemporary collections. The era's emphasis on craftsmanship and ornamentation resonates with today's appreciation for artisanal fashion.

Moreover, vintage and historical fashion enthusiasts often seek out turn of the century dresses for their unique blend of elegance and historical significance. These garments continue to be a source of inspiration for costume designers, historians, and fashion scholars alike.

Preservation and Collecting of Turn of the Century Dresses

Due to the delicate nature of fabrics and embellishments used, turn of the century dresses require careful preservation. Museums and private collectors employ specialized conservation techniques to maintain these garments, which serve as valuable cultural artifacts.

Collectors often assess turn of the century dresses based on factors such as fabric quality, condition, provenance, and rarity. Authentic pieces from prominent designers or with unique features can command significant interest in the vintage fashion market.

- **Pros of Collecting:** Historical value, investment potential, educational use.
- **Cons of Collecting:** Fragility, storage requirements, potential for damage.

Challenges in Authenticity and Reproduction

One of the challenges in dealing with turn of the century dresses is verifying authenticity. Reproductions and forgeries exist, especially as interest in vintage fashion grows. Accurate identification requires expertise in fabric, construction techniques, and stylistic details typical of the era.

Reproductions are popular among theater productions and reenactment communities, offering an accessible way to experience turn of the century fashion without risking damage to original garments.

The nuanced details and historical context embedded in turn of the century dresses make them a rich subject for ongoing study. They offer a window into an era of transformation—not only in fashion but in society as a whole—highlighting how clothing serves as both a personal and cultural statement.

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turn of the century dresses: *Authentic Victorian Fashion Patterns* Kristina Harris, 1999-01-01 Rich selection of dressmaker's patterns from popular, late-19th-century magazine *The Voice of Fashion* includes 50 garments for women, from day and evening dresses to tennis outfits and undergarments. 498 illustrations.

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turn of the century dresses: *Regional Dress* Sara Hume, 2022-06-16 Traditional dress is a common phenomenon across much of Western Europe, often originating in elaborate practices for rural religious events. Yet despite its fundamentally local nature, traditional dress in various European regions developed along a similar trajectory, sometimes being transformed into political symbols and regional promotion for tourism, and always revealing the complexity of rural society in terms of religious divisions, class inequality and tension between the desires to protect tradition and embrace modernity. To better understand how traditional dress evolved in France and Germany from the 19th to 21st centuries, this book takes Alsace as its case study and in doing so illuminates broad experiences of modernity across rural Europe and answers overarching questions about regionalism and nationalism. Specifically, Sara Hume unpacks why Alsatian dress was adopted as a symbol of loyalty to France despite being closer in style to German dress practices. She explores the impact of political and geographical tensions on the appearance and function of traditional clothing, for example in Alsace's situation at the border between France and Germany and in its transformation from disputed territory into capital of a united Europe. Logically progressing chapters reveal how modernity did not drive out tradition in rural communities but rather led to processes of adaption, preservation and re-evaluation. Through a rich variety of primary sources including costumes, illustrations, political cartoons, legal documents and oral histories, *Regional Dress* sheds light on the little known and rarely documented experiences of rural Europeans. Its material culture approach to the study of regionalism is essential to students of traditional and folk dress history, European history and design history.

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nineteenth-century broad arrows and black and white stripes to twenty first-century orange jumpsuits, prison clothing has both mirrored and bolstered the power of penal institutions over prisoners' lives. Vividly illustrated and based on original research, including throughout the voices of the incarcerated, this book is a pioneering history and investigation of prison dress, which demystifies the experience of what it is like to be an imprisoned criminal. Juliet Ash takes the reader on a journey from the production of prison clothing to the bodies of its wearers. She uncovers a history characterized by waves of reform, sandwiched between regimes that use clothing as punishment and discovers how inmates use their dress to surmount, subvert or survive these punishment cultures. She reveals the hoods, the masks, and pink boxer shorts, near nakedness, even twenty first-century 'civvies' to be not just other types of uniform but political embodiments of the surveillance of everyday life.

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Llewellyn-Jones, 2001-12-31 The clothing and ornament of Greek women signalled much about the status and the morality assigned to them. Yet this revealing aspect of women's history has been little studied. In this collection of new studies by an international team, ancient visual evidence from vase-painting and sculpture is used extensively alongside Greek literature to reconstruct how women of the Greek world were perceived, and also, in important ways, how they lived.

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tribute to a time when style -- and maybe even life -- felt more straightforward, and however arbitrary, there were definitive answers. -- Sadie Stein, Paris Review As a glance down any street in America quickly reveals, American women have forgotten how to dress. We lack the fashion know-how we need to dress professionally and beautifully. In *The Lost Art of Dress*, historian and dressmaker Linda Przybyszewski reveals that this wasn't always true. In the first half of the twentieth century, a remarkable group of women -- the so-called Dress Doctors -- taught American women that knowledge, not money, was key to a beautiful wardrobe. They empowered women to design, make, and choose clothing for both the workplace and the home. Armed with the Dress Doctors' simple design principles -- harmony, proportion, balance, rhythm, emphasis -- modern American women from all classes learned to dress for all occasions in ways that made them confident, engaged members of society. A captivating and beautifully illustrated look at the world of the Dress Doctors, *The Lost Art of Dress* introduces a new audience to their timeless rules of fashion and beauty -- rules which, with a little help, we can certainly learn again.

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twentieth-century lingerie. This book examines the ways cultural meanings are orchestrated by the 'fashion-industrial complex, ' and the ways in which individuals and groups embrace, reject, or derive meaning from these everyday, yet significant, intimate articles of clothing.

turn of the century dresses: Costumes for the Stage Sheila Jackson, 2001-09-26 This updated

edition of *Costumes for the Stage* aims at simplicity in all aspects of designing and making costumes. It is designed primarily for those who need to dress plays on a small budget, whether for amateur, semi-professional, or professional groups. Starting with five pages illustrating the basic shapes of each period, Sheila Jackson provides practical advice for every kind of play, together with drawings, diagrams, and patterns from which to work. Included are sections on Greek plays, medieval miracles and mysteries, Shakespeare, seventeenth century, eighteenth century, Victorian and Edwardian costume, the twenties and thirties, and the present day. Each section covers the details of men's and women's clothes (hats, collars, shoes, jewelry, etc.) as well as methods for adapting and simplifying the style of the period. There are also sections on pantomimes and musicals, pageants and school plays, and invaluable advice on underwear, fabrics, measurements and fitting, the use of color, and simple ways to make masks, crowns, and decorations. The revised edition features expanded text and new illustrations. Hundreds of line drawings and no-nonsense, authoritative text combine to make this an essential book of costume design.

turn of the century dresses: The Routledge History of Fashion and Dress, 1800 to the

Present Veronique Pouillard, Vincent Dubé-Senéal, 2023-10-24 The time span covered by The

Routledge History of Fashion and Dress starts in the nineteenth century, with the aftermath of the consumers' revolution, and reaches all the way to the present. The fashion and garment industries have been international from the beginning and, as such, this volume looks at the history of fashion and dress through the lenses of both international and global history. Because fashion is also a multifaceted subject with humanagency at its core, at the confluence of thematerial (fabrics, clothing, dyes, tools, and machines) and the immaterial (savoir-faire, identities, images, and brands), this volume adopts a transdisciplinary perspective, opening its pages to researchers from a variety of complementary fields. The chapters in this volume are organized based on their relationship to five fields of study: economics and commerce, politics, business, identities, and historical sources. Paying particular attention to change, the book goes beyond the great fashion capitals and well-known fashion centers and points to the broader geographies of fashion. Particular geographical areas focus on the emergence of new fashion systems and business models, whether they be in Sweden, Bangladesh, or Spain, or on the African continent, considered to be the "new frontier" of the industry. Covering myriad aspects of the subject this is the perfect companion for all those interested in history of dress and fashion in the modern world.

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turn of the century dresses: *The Saturated World* Beverly Gordon, 2006 Explores the way middle-class American women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries added meaning to their lives through their domestic amusements--leisure pursuits that took place in and were largely focused on the home. Women elaborated on their everyday tasks and responsibilities with these amusements thus cultivating a heightened, aesthetically charged saturated state and created self-contained enchanted worlds.

turn of the century dresses: *Osage and Settler* Janet Berry Hess, 2015-06-08 Drawing on a rare family archive and archival material from the Osage Nation, this book documents a unique relationship among white settlers, the Osage and African Americans in Oklahoma. The history of white settlement and colonization is often discussed in the context of the cultural erasure of, and violence perpetuated against, American Indians and enslaved blacks. Conversely, histories of American Indian nations often end with colonial conquest, and exclude the experiences of white settlers. The author's anthropological approach examines the lived experience of individuals--including her own family members--and their nuanced and intersecting relationships as

they negotiate cultural and geographic landscapes of oppression and technological change. The art, architecture, body ornamentation, sacred objects, ceremonies and performances accompanying this transformation are all addressed.

turn of the century dresses: *Poetics of Dance* Gabriele Brandstetter, 2015-03-11 When it was first published in Germany in 1995, *Poetics of Dance* was already seen as a path-breaking publication, the first to explore the relationships between the birth of modern dance, new developments in the visual arts, and the renewal of literature and drama in the form of avant-garde theatrical and movement productions of the early twentieth-century. Author Gabriele Brandstetter established in this book not only a relation between dance and critical theory, but in fact a full interdisciplinary methodology that quickly found foothold with other areas of research within dance studies. The book looks at dance at the beginnings of the 20th century, the time during which modern dance first began to make its radical departure from the aesthetics of classical ballet. Brandstetter traces modern dance's connection to new innovations and trends in visual and literary arts to argue that modern dance is in fact the preeminent symbol of modernity. As Brandstetter demonstrates, the aesthetic renewal of dance vocabulary which was pursued by modern dancers on both sides of the Atlantic - Isadora Duncan and Loie Fuller, Valeska Gert and Oskar Schlemmer, Vaslav Nijinsky and Michel Fokine - unfurled itself in new ideas about gender and subjectivity in the arts more generally, thus reflecting the modern experience of life and the self-understanding of the individual as an individual. As a whole, the book makes an important contribution to the theory of modernity.

turn of the century dresses: *Dress Like A Grownup! A Complete Tutorial for the Average Guy, Volume Two* William J. Thompson, 2012-10-31 This book series is based on the popular blog of the same name, written by a sartorial historian and tailor. It addresses the average guy, who has dressed the same way since his childhood -- jeans and a tee-shirt, for instance -- and, in the format of a step-by-step tutorial, shows him how to dress like a functioning adult. The conversational style is that of a direct address to the reader. Volume Two begins where Volume One leaves off: topics include how to shop for clothes efficiently, setting aside time to attend to your wardrobe, choosing proper shoes, wearing a hat, and determining what to wear, and when. The topics are taken from the blog's weekly installments, but the book includes illustrations, information, and clarification not elaborated upon in the blog.

turn of the century dresses: *The Cut of Women's Clothes* Norah Waugh, 2013-10-08 Each period in the history of costume has produced its own characteristic line and silhouette, derived from a cut and construction which varies considerably from age to age. Here are patterns taken from actual dresses, many of them rare museum specimens, illustrated by sketches of the dresses. There are notes on the production of women's dress, with references to early technical books and journals, together with diagrams from some of them. Numerous illustrations show the dresses as worn complete with their hairstyles, jewelry, decorations and accessories.

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turn of the century dresses: *Costumes of Egypt* Shahira Mehrez, 2000-12-31 *Costumes of Egypt: The Lost Legacies* sums up decades of Shahira Mehrez's research: it is a four-volume work recording and tracing the origin of hitherto undocumented ways of dressing and jewelry of Egyptian women, most of which have today become obsolete. The costumes surveyed in this first volume establish the fact that irrespective of distant geographic locations, beyond religious and ethnic diversity, and throughout thousands of years of history and successive civilizations, Nubians, Nile Valley peasants, Bedouins and oasis dwellers, both Christian and Muslim, were heirs to the same legacy. Old and new emblems were melted into one tradition, defining a multifaceted but harmonious Egyptian identity. This tradition provides undeniable and tangible proof of the unity of the country and bears witness to the fact that throughout history these various communities were the different parts of a multicultural and pluralistic nation.

turn of the century dresses: *The Hidden Consumer* Christopher Breward, 1999 This book covers various aspects of the social history of politics on both sides of the Iron Curtain in the period 1945 to 1956. The contributors come from a range of countries (Austria, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia and the United Kingdom) and comprise a mixture of established historians and younger scholars engaged in pioneering research. The individual chapters are organised into four sections dealing with workers, ethnic and linguistic minorities, youth, and women. In order to enhance the comparative character of the volume, the four chapters contained in each section consider the position of these social groups in, respectively, West Germany, East Germany, Austria, and either Czechoslovakia or Hungary. Major themes include the absence of popular revolutions in the aftermath of World War Two, the re-imposition of social control by post-war elites, the attempt to restore pre-war gender relations, and the failure of Communist parties to win popular support. The chosen time-frame saw most of the decisive developments which set the pattern for the remaining Cold War period and is therefore of key importance for any student of this topic.

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