

In Defense Of Hats



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On a recent trip to New York, my friend Joe insisted that I go with him to a haberdashery on Fifth Avenue. The shop sold hats

and nothing but hats -- big hats, little hats, tall hats, wide-brim hats, narrow-brim hats, Panama hats, Italian hats, men's hats, women's hats, casual hats, formal hats, expensive hats, very expensive hats, and a few somewhat less expensive hats. I had never seen so many hats in one place. I did not know the difference between a bowler, a derby, and a beret, but I was impressed.

The haberdasher, a short man of probable Italian descent with a noticeable accent, spotted me immediately as I entered the door. He had already sold Joe a \$400 number earlier in the day and he knew an opportunity when he saw one. When my wife and our friends Steve and Carolyn, entered the shop shortly after we did, he knew he was going to have a good day.

I confess that I have always had a weakness for hats. Although I wear them only occasionally, I have found that they have a marvelous utility. In the winter, they keep you warm better than a topcoat. When it is raining, they keep your head dry better than an umbrella. In the summer, they shield your eyes from the sun often as well as, or better than sunglasses, and at all times, they protect your face from dangerous UV rays.

Moreover, hats play an indispensable role in the English language. Consider all the ideas, metaphors, and expressions that are derived from hats:

Good: White hat

Bad: Black hat

Best: Top hat

Obsolete: Old hat

Courteous: Tip of the hat

Sportsmanship: I'll just have to take my hat off to them

Charitable: Pass the hat

Humble: Hat in hand

Secretive: Keep that under your hat
Political: Throw (or toss) your hat in the ring
Confident but wrong: Talking out of your hat
Insane: Mad as a hatter
Snobbishness: High-hatting
False vanity (Texas style): All hat, no cattle
Flexible: Wears multiple hats
Has conflict of interest: Wears multiple hats
Surprising achievement: Hat trick
Surprising set back: I'll eat my hat
Surprising skill: He pulled a rabbit out of his hat
Prepare for surprise: Hang on to your hat
Instantaneous: At the drop of a hat
Logical support: Something to hang his hat on

And yet, despite these many advantages and uses, we as a society have largely stopped wearing hats. It happened shortly after the Eisenhower administration. Baby boomers do not wear hats. Baseball caps, yes, occasionally, but we do not wear hats. Why?

I read somewhere (this is what I say when I'm making stuff up) that it has to do with television, good hair, and John F. Kennedy. John F. Kennedy had beautiful hair. It looked good on television. It was extremely cold the day he gave his inaugural address -- "Ask not what your country can do for you ... etc." -- but he did not wear a hat. He looked good. He had great hair. Eisenhower had lost his hair while saving the world from fascism and communism, but he did not look good on television. He wore a hat. He looked old. We liked John F. Kennedy.

We, as a generation, became obsessed with hair - long hair, curly hair, blow-dried hair (remember the 70s), hair of every kind. There was a Broadway musical called "Hair" where people even got naked on stage. (I saw the traveling version here in Atlanta, but you couldn't see much because of all the ... hair.) Baby boomers do not wear hats. They show their hair.

Friends, we must change our ways. A quick look around any gathering of Atlanta lawyers demonstrates why -- yes, friends, as a group, we have lost or are rapidly losing our hair. We need hats. Of course there are those of us -- yours truly included -- who still have our hair. But for how long? We must end our obsession with hair in order to save our brothers who have none. They have no defense to the cold, to the rain, and to the cancerous sun, but because of fashion - a generational anomaly - they are afraid to wear hats. I know what

it is like. I have worn a hat to my office on cold winter mornings only to be greeted derisively by my colleagues. "Nice hat," they snicker mockingly. I arrive warm, but my ego is shattered.

It does not have to be this way. Hats really look good. Humphrey Bogart wore all kinds of hats and he looked great. He got all the women he wanted, including Ingrid Bergman in "Casablanca," and did it while wearing hats. His hair was okay, but he looked cool in a hat. We need to change our attitudes. Hats are cool. Hats are sexy.

Moreover, if everyone wore a hat, it would restore equality to the bar. Hats are the great equalizer when it comes to hair. No longer would we be divided into those who have great hair and those who do not. If we all wore hats, the hair-challenged as well as the well-coiffed would become united. It would go a long way toward easing discrimination against those with hair disabilities. While hair-challenged men would still have to take off their hats inside (ladies are exempt from this requirement for some reason), they would not be so disadvantaged as before. While not as great a problem as hair loss, great hair can suffer after long periods under a hat. Hat hair, it's called. It gives the hair-challenged a fighting chance because they seem neat and together by comparison. It is only fair and right that those of us with natural hair advantages make this small sacrifice for the good of our country and our generation.

The haberdasher smiled at me. "I have the perfect hat for you," he said. The key, he explained, is to match the man with the hat. He reached under his counter and pulled out a lovely fedora, a "Borsalino" made in Italy. At \$350, it was a bargain. I put it on. I looked in the mirror, admiring the result. My wife said, "That's a great hat." Joe, Steve, and Carolyn agreed. Sold. The man turned to Steve. "But I don't look good in hats," he protested. My face is too narrow and I look silly. "Nonsense," said Joe. "I have the perfect hat for you," said the haberdasher. "Try it," said Carolyn. Steve tried on an Italian fedora, with a slightly narrower brim. After checking the mirror, he agreed it looked good, resulting in another sale.

We left the shop, happy in our new hats, knowing that we not only looked great, but we were also doing something good for our generation. It is not too late for the rest of you. ■