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OPINION

Column: It's your closet — you decide

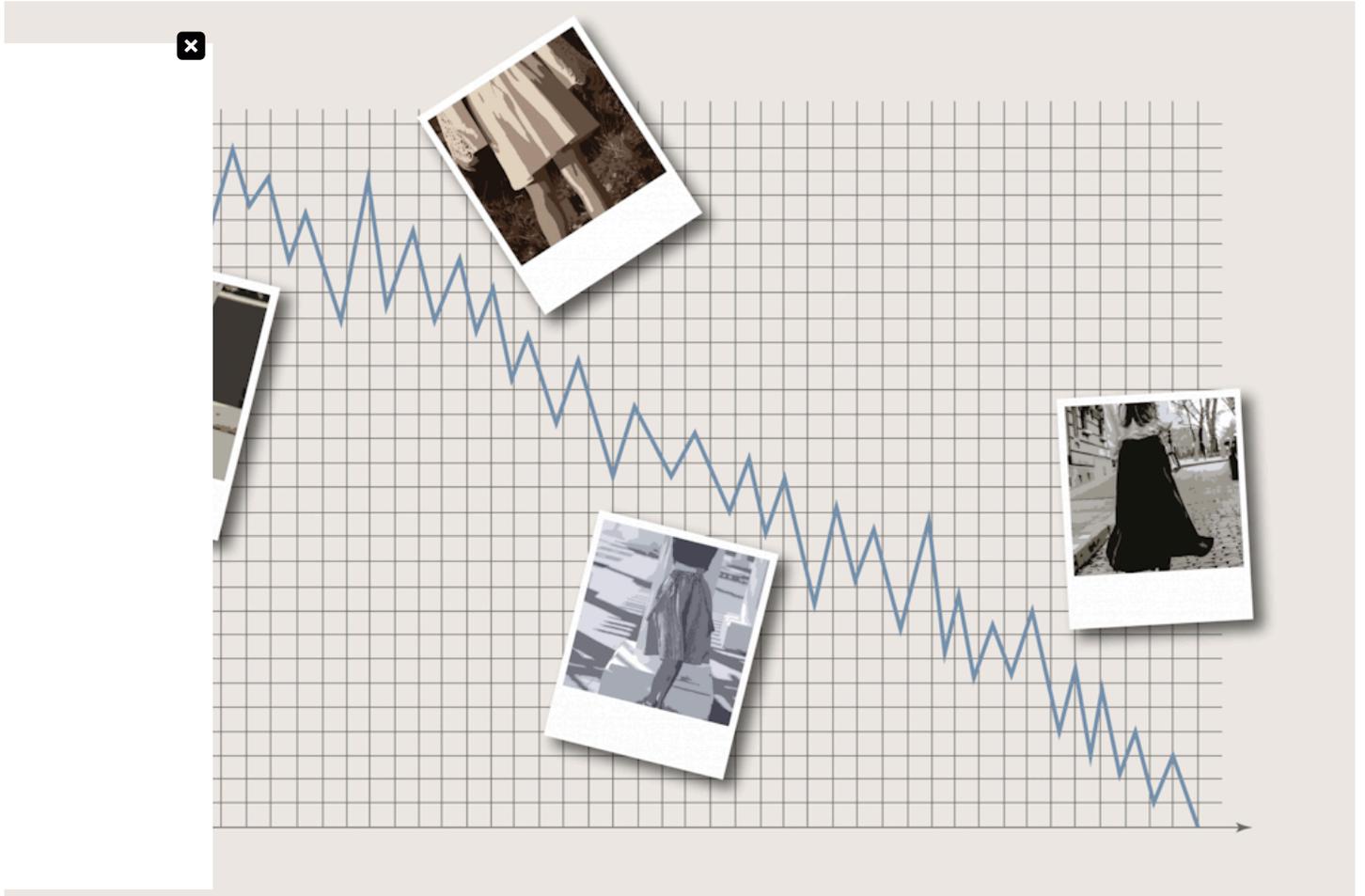


Photo by [Sophia Alem](#) / The Daily Tar Heel

DTH Graphic

By [Madeline Whitaker](#)

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Have you ever wondered how fashion trends worked before the fast-paced world of smartphones, social media and influencers? Traditionally, trends originated from a few select fashion houses and were ruminated over by elites before trickling down to boutique windows where the average housewife would stop, stare and purchase.

Fashion was a prolonged process that lent itself to influences like the economy.

In 1926, economist George Taylor introduced the hemline index theory. He observed that, as the economy flourished, hemlines shortened and shorter skirts made their way to the streets. During periods of economic depression, Taylor noticed, hemlines tended to lengthen.



is, at first glance, a plausible theory. In the 1920s, hemlines rose. Then, along with the Great got longer. In times of prosperity, many women wanted to boast their expensive stockings, leading to think flapper skirts of the 1920s and mini skirts in the 1960s.

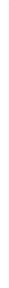
o the fashion archives, and you'll see that the hemline index might not hold up. War, politics, ial movements influence what we wear.

l to drop long, sweeping skirts in its spring collection. Some women welcomed the new just-in look, ed to reject the autocratic role of designer fashion houses, giving birth to the "Little Below the Knee

ted over 300,000 members who advocated for the luxury of choice when it came to clothing. In the spirit of their name, the group campaigned for skirts that hit "a little below the knee" to remain fashionable.

In the eyes of the average American woman, long skirts alluded to the garb of the Cult of Domesticity. They symbolized the perfect picture of a 1950s domestic housewife — a loving mother devoted to raising kids and cooking meals while her husband worked to provide for the household.

Following World War II, a time when women stepped into the workforce, sentiment on the rigidity of gender roles began to slowly shift. Women were desperate for control in their everyday lives, beginning with how they dressed. Rosie the Riveter didn't wear Victorian-style skirts, so why should they be forced to?



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hemline index.

When high-end fashion brands releasing a new coveted line only for it to be partially rejected by

It became less like a puppet at the fickle mercy of a few famous houses and more a vehicle of individualism. In the 1990s, the industry saw the emergence of style identities for certain social groups like punk and grunge. They developed stronger methods of fighting the status quo or making political statements through clothing, such as the length of their skirts.

They worked to eliminate the bejeweled barrier between high fashion and the common department store. We saw designers work the runways in real-time and either make a knock-off that's the same quality and one-fourth of the price or the brand missed their mark this season.

Designer fashion isn't exclusive and unattainable anymore because it has become a choice to consumers, not the end-all-be-all of having style.

Now, with TikTok accelerating the trend cycle and opening the fashion stage up to anyone amassing a following, there is no one avenue to being stylish.

With the amount of inspiration at our fingertips, our closets no longer have to be as privy to the institution of fashion, the economy or societal pressures. Our wardrobes can exist solely as manifestations of our interests, experiences and personalities. Trends are great tethers, but there's also power in letting go of them.

For many of us, clothing is much more than fabric and thread. It's our armor, our canvas, our uniform, our costume and our passion. There is no possible index that could determine a rhyme or reason to what's in Vogue.

It's whatever we want.

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