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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Gender, Clothing Fasteners, and Dress Practices in Houston's Freedmen's Town, ca. 1880–1904

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Abstract Between 1880 and 1904, African American residents of Freedmen's Town in Houston, Texas, were buried in the Third New City Cemetery. Using an assemblage of clothing fasteners recovered during excavations of the cemetery, I attempt to identify patterns of use and to interpret the kinds of clothing ensembles represented among men and women. The main goal of this study is to discern potential gendered patterns of clothing-fastener use that could assist in analyzing similar data from other sites. A related, secondary focus of this research is the working-class, gendered identity of black Houstonians and the roles of consumerism and clothing within the context of a segregationist Southern city.

Extracto Entre 1880 y 1904, los residentes afroamericanos del barrio de esclavos emancipados Freedmen's Town en Houston, Texas, fueron enterrados en el cementerio Third New City Cemetery. Al utilizar un conjunto de sujetadores de ropa recuperados durante las excavaciones del cementerio, intento identificar patrones de uso e interpretar los tipos de conjuntos de ropa representados entre hombres y mujeres. El objetivo principal de este estudio es discernir posibles patrones de género del uso de prendas de vestir que podrían ayudar a analizar datos similares de otros sitios. Un enfoque secundario relacionado de esta investigación es la identidad de género de la clase trabajadora de los habitantes negros de Houston y los roles del consumismo y la vestimenta en el contexto de una ciudad sureña segregacionista.

Résumé Entre 1880 et 1904, les résidents africains-américains de Freedmen's Town à Houston, au Texas, étaient enterrés dans le cimetière de Third New City. Sur la base d'un assemblage d'agrafes de vêtements trouvées au cours des fouilles du cimetière, je m'efforce d'identifier des modèles d'utilisation et d'interpréter les types d'ensembles vestimentaires représentés parmi les hommes et les femmes. L'objectif principal de cette étude est de discerner des modèles genrés potentiels relatifs à l'utilisation d'une agrafe de vêtement, qui sont susceptibles de contribuer à une analyse de données similaires issues d'autres sites. Cette recherche s'attache également à un aspect secondaire mais connexe, à savoir l'identité genrée des habitants noirs de Houston et les rôles du consumérisme et de l'habillement dans le contexte d'une ville du Sud ségrégationniste.

Keywords post-emancipation African Americans · gender · race · clothing fasteners · sartorial practices

Introduction

Anyone who has encountered clothing fasteners while excavating sites dating to the late 19th century understands the uncertainty that comes with interpreting them. Mass produced and widely available from local to

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national retailers, buttons, cuff links, hooks and eyes, and other fasteners were purchased and worn by Americans from all walks of life. Since these fasteners are typically all that remains in the archaeological record of the garments people wore, they are a central line of evidence for addressing questions regarding dress practices. Historical archaeologists have demonstrated the potential to move from an analysis of clothing fasteners to interpretations of social life in the past, yet the number of published case studies remains relatively low (Hinks 1988; Heath 1999, 2004; Lindbergh 1999; Psota 2002; B. Thomas and L. Thomas 2004; C. White 2005, 2008, 2009; Galle 2010; Loren 2010; Chicone 2011; Cofield 2012; Hutchins 2013; Davidson 2014; Salmi and Kuokkanen 2014; J. Smith 2017; Van Buren and Gensmer 2017; Flewellen 2018). Moving from an assemblage of buttons to delineating the different items to which they were once attached—usually the initial analytical step taken—presents a significant challenge.

Historical sources often lack useful commentary on 19th-century clothing fasteners, and it can be nearly impossible to identify them or discern their details in period photographs. Still, primary documents, including illustrations, photos, mail-order catalogs, and eyewitness accounts, along with the secondary literature on button collecting and clothing and fashion, have proven useful in researching what people once wore, how, and why. Coupled with reliable contextual information that connects fasteners to specific site features, some historical archaeologists have successfully managed to associate fasteners with items of dress and, from there, interpret the meaning of the clothing (Lindbergh 1999; Loren 2001; Voss 2008).

With sufficiently accurate provenience and details of the fasteners themselves, researchers have had success in interpreting dress when they were able to identify the clothing ensembles worn by the deceased in cemetery contexts (Owens 2000; Mainford and Davidson 2006). The advantages of this approach are obvious, but deserve mention here: the burials can be dated with some precision (using coffin hardware, etc.); the osteological analysis often provides sex and age identifications; and the broader demographic of the interred population can often be discerned from the historical records. However, while there are exceptions (Davidson and Mainfort 2008; Davidson and Black 2015), most of these studies are conducted as part of cultural resource management (CRM) projects where the results are disseminated in technical reports with limited circulation. My purpose here is to pursue this approach, the analysis of clothing fasteners recovered from a late 19th-century African American cemetery, in order to try to identify and interpret patterns of fastener use that can assist other researchers.

In what follows, I discuss the history of Houston's Freedmen's Town, a booming enclave of African Americans founded after emancipation, and summarize the archaeological research associated with the Third New City Cemetery (TNCC). An overview of the clothing fasteners that are the subject of this research then follows. The bulk of this article focuses on the outcomes of the analysis and the interpretations of the garments people wore when interred, based on the clothing fasteners. I conclude by discussing what the findings reveal about African American consumerism and sartorial practices in this urban context, and suggest which specific results are potentially relevant to assemblages recovered from other historical sites.

Black Houston following Emancipation

African Americans have been present in Houston since its founding in 1836. Prior to emancipation, enslaved laborers worked on area ranches and plantations (Campbell 1989:124–125). Within the fledgling city, most were domestics, while others worked in the growing commercial, service, and construction industries (Haygood 1992). After the war, former field hands migrated to Houston, arriving first in the Fourth Ward (Steptoe 2016:27). Many searched for family members (Crouch 1992a:39–53), and most sought to escape the plantation, where farming for whites trapped blacks in a "hopeless cycle of work, debt, and poverty" (Litwack 1998:137; Steptoe 2016:26–27). Between 1860 and 1870, the number of African Americans in Houston more than tripled, and by 1870 they constituted nearly 40% of the population of 9,400 residents (Beeth and Wintz 1992:21; Crouch 1992b:55).

The city's oldest black enclave, Freedmen's Town (originally Freedmantown [McDavid 2011:75]), was founded right after the war, and the Fourth Ward came to be recognized as the "Mother Ward" of black Houston (McDavid 2011:75) (Fig. 1). Although African Americans also lived in other wards (Beeth and Wintz 1992:23), Freedmen's Town was the economic, political, and cultural hub of black Houston (Beeth and Wintz 1992:165; Steptoe 2016:27). Yet black Houston's rise

coincided with growing racial oppression and violence. In 1866 the Texas legislature enacted black codes similar to those passed in other Southern states, and the state's infamous convict-leasing system was one result (Crouch 1992a:134–180; Litwack 1998:270–276). Although residential segregation was never codified in Houston, by the 1870s it was the reality. The state's constitution institutionalized school segregation in 1876, and, in 1891, the same applied to travel by rail (Beeth and Wintz 1992:88; Steptoe 2016:26). By the 1920s, city ordinances had "completed the Jim-Crowing of Houston" (Steptoe 2016:29–30).

Despite the entrenchment of segregation, Houston's black residents continued to grow their institutions and neighborhoods, and nurture their civic and political life. Influential black churches arose across the city, and every ward had a black public school by 1871. Blacks purchased land to create Emancipation Park and formed mutual aid and social organizations, including fraternal orders, such as the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows and several Masonic lodges (Morrison and Fourmey 1882; Beeth and Wintz 1992:94; Richardson 1992). As African Americans worked to secure better lives for themselves, they asserted the same level of commitment in ensuring that, in death, the departed would be laid to rest respectfully (Davidson 2004). Thus, the black funeral, or "homegoing," played an integral role in community life (Stanley 2016).

The focus of this study, clothing fasteners recovered from a Freedmen's Town cemetery, raises the issue of the ways individuals were laid to rest in black communities. Black funeral practices rest on a heritage of mourning rituals dating back to slavery that continued in practice after freedom (Holloway 2002; Davidson 2010; King 2010). The significance of passing from life to death and entering a state free of oppression still resonated with freedmen. As Suzanne Smith (2010:17–18) writes: "Historically, death in the African American cultural imagination was not feared but rather embraced as the ultimate 'homegoing,' a welcome journey to a spiritual existence that would transcend the suffering and injustices of the mortal world." Thus, homegoings were as much about celebration as mourning the passing of loved ones.

Black funerals were characteristically elaborate ceremonies, where friends and families gathered to celebrate, mourn, sing, and say their farewells to those who passed away (Stanley 2016). Given the highly public nature of homegoings and the strong desire to ensure that the deceased were buried with dignity, people were laid to rest in their best clothing. The evidence from 19th-century African American cemeteries indicates that many of the deceased were commonly interred in "street clothes" rather than burial shrouds or robes (Rose 1985; Owens 2000; Mainfort and Davidson 2006; Feit and Trask 2013; Norment et al. 2016). That is, people were laid to rest in garments that they wore in life, usually ones reserved for attending church or special occasions, rather than their work attire. Although a number of men buried at the TNCC, in particular, were dressed in more formal attire as indicated by their shirts, the evidence suggests that men and women in general were interred in modest rather than expensive attire. The potential significance of this clothing is one of the issues addressed by this research.

Project Background: The Third New City Cemetery

From 1996 to 1998, archaeologists with the CRM firm PBS&J (now Atkins) conducted excavations at the Allen Parkway Village (APV) site (41HR886), located on a 36 ac. tract within Houston's Fourth Ward (Fig. 1). Freedmen's Town thrived for decades after its founding, but beginning in the 1930s the neighborhood's stability was undermined as white businesses and institutions moved into the Fourth Ward (McDavid 2006, 2011). The city's "slum clearance" initiative in the 1940s proved to be especially damaging to Freedmen's Town, which by then was referred to as the San Felipe district. This resulted in the construction of APV, which opened in 1944 as San Felipe Courts. Prior to construction, over 900 burials were disinterred and moved to Brookside Memorial Cemetery. San Felipe Courts was initially reserved as residences for whites only, but was renamed Allen Parkway Village in 1964 and transitioned into public housing (Foster and Nance 2002:15; McDavid 2006). The PBS&J excavations were contracted as part of the Houston Housing Authority's plan to redevelop the APV by demolishing the majority of the housing units, which sparked protests among residents and low-income housing advocates. The racial and class politics involved with gentrification of the Fourth Ward are beyond the scope of this article, but have been discussed by others (Ghirardo 1984; Taylor 1991; McDavid 2006, 2011; Meeks 2011).

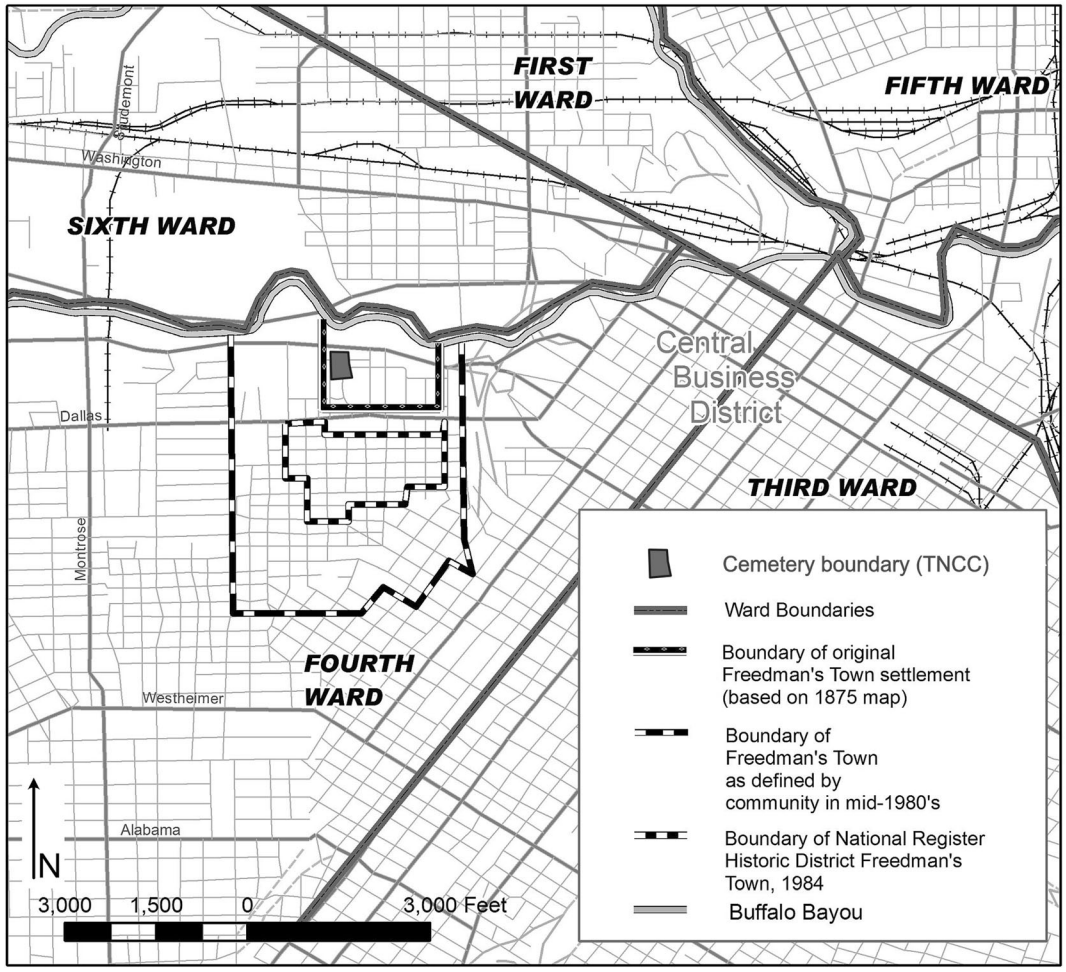

Fig. 1 Map of central Houston, showing the location of Freedmen's Town and the Third New City Cemetery (McDavid 2011:figure 1). (Map by Robert Marcom, 2011.)

A major focus of the research was the excavation of the TNCC, located in the northwestern corner of the APV property (Fig. 1). The city purchased the property in 1859 as part of a 12 ac. tract for a hospital (Foster and Nance 2002:107). Although the hospital occupied a section of what became the TNCC and patients were buried on land surrounding it, "the cemetery never was a repository solely, or even primarily, for deceased hospital patients" (Foster and Nance 2002:115). In 1879, the city council designated the hospital graveyard for use by the city and named it New City Cemetery. This cemetery was mainly in use between ca. 1880 and 1904, when it was officially closed (Foster and Nance 2002:115). Its time of operation coincides with the period during which the African American population of Freedmen's Town was burgeoning and the neighborhood was developing into the hub of black economic and cultural life in Houston (Foster and Nance 2002:17–19).

Although none of the TNCC burials were marked with headstones, the claim that it served as a resting place primarily for African Americans during the late 19th century, especially for those who resided in Freedmen's Town, is a sound one. There is one contemporaneous black cemetery, Olivewood, that was established in 1877. Yet Olivewood Cemetery is not in Freedmen's Town and is located at the junction of the city's First and Sixth wards. There is one other historical African American cemetery located in close proximity to the Fourth Ward. College Park Cemetery, however, was not founded until 1896. Moreover, in order to determine which community the TNCC served, researchers consulted the city's death records. They found that the "ethnic

composition of the cemetery was reported to be largely African American, and the available city death records for 1900 confirm that description" (Foster and Nance 2002:115). During that year, 243 interments at the TNCC were recorded by race and, of those, 78% of the deceased were African American, 22% were Anglo-American, and 1% of the decedents were listed as Hispanic (Foster and Nance 2002:130).

Archaeologists excavated 446 possible burial features, but due to poor bone preservation across the site (Foster and Nance 2002:115,117), only 355 burials contained human remains. The current study is based on a subset of this group. Of the 355 individuals disinterred, the 97 individuals selected for this study met several criteria: sex for each individual was based on the osteological results, rather than associated material culture (Foster and Nance 2002:119–120); specific or general age range for each was determined; and there was at least one clothing fastener recovered from the grave. Since there were so few children who met these criteria, only six, they were not included in this study. There are 63 subadults and adults (25 males and 38 females) who met the first two criteria, but who lacked clothing fasteners. These individuals may have been buried in shrouds instead of clothing. Shrouds were typically secured with safety pins, and the absence of even pin fragments from these interments might be due to the method of recovery. Although each burial was troweled by hand, excavators did not water-screen burial fill. This likely resulted in a lower rate of recovery of small finds, such as hook-and-eye and safety-pin fragments.

Nearly all of the subsample selected for further research were adults, with a few possible exceptions: one male and one female, aged 13–24 years (possible subadults), and one female aged 0–24 years. Altogether, the clothing fasteners that were selected were recovered from the burials of 34 females and 63 males (Table 1). They are herein referred to collectively as adults; over half of them were relatively old (50 years or more) when they passed.

The following section provides a summary of the artifacts used in the analysis. Since all were reinterred prior to this study, a reexamination of these artifacts for clarification or to check for accuracy in their identification was not possible. Moreover, few of the fasteners associated with the burials chosen for this study were photographed.

Table 1 Individuals interred at the TNCC with clothing fasteners by sex and age group

AGE (YEARS)	F	%	M	%
0–24	1	3	0	0
13–24	1	3	1	3
Older subadult/adult	1	3	0	0
Indet. adult	8	24	12	19
25–49	4	12	14	22
50+	19	56	36	57
Totals	**34**	**100**	**63**	**100**

Fastening Clothes: The TNCC Assemblage

A total of 463 clothing-related artifacts were recovered from the 97 burials (Table 2). The following is a general overview of the finds, as others have provided more in-depth treatments of 19th-century clothing fasteners (Pool 1991; Lindbergh 1999; Owens 2000; Sprague 2002; Mainfort and Davidson 2006; McGowan and Prangnell 2011). In general, the clothing-related artifacts recovered from the TNCC were mass produced and in wide circulation during the time period in question. Not only were the buttons discussed below attached to ready-made clothing, but consumers could purchase them separately in bulk from either mail-order catalogs or general stores to mend and make garments. Importantly, most of these clothing fasteners were utilitarian and/or relatively inexpensive.

Buttons

Buttons constitute 66% of the study assemblage (Table 2), and these were cataloged by material (Table 3), attachment type, and size. Decoration was noted for some fasteners. Since button size was originally recorded in fractions of an inch, for this study these

Table 2 Clothing fasteners by sex

Type of Fastener	F	%	M	%	Total	%
Button	72	59	234	69	306	66
Cuff/collar	11	9	58	17	69	15
Buckle	8	7	27	8	35	8
Hook and eye	13	11	17	5	30	6
Safety pin	18	15	5	1	23	5
Total	**122**	**100**	**341**	**100**	**463**	**100**

Table 3 Buttons by material class

Button Material	F	%	M	%	Total	%
Prosser	50	69	105	45	155	51
Metal	4	6	64	27	68	22
Iron	3	4	34	16	37	12
Brass	0	0	6	3	6	2
Copper alloy	1	1	3	1	4	1
Bone	0	0	16	7	16	5
Rubber	9	12	5	2	14	5
Glass	4	6	0	0	4	1
Shell	1	1	1	1	2	1
All	**72**	**100**	**234**	**100**	**306**	**100**

Table 5 Prosser buttons

Type	*N*	%
4-holed dish	130	84
4-holed piecrust	10	6
2-holed dish	5	3
4-holed dish, blue	3	2
4-holed dish, black	2	1
4-holed tire	2	1
2-holed piecrust	1	1
4-holed dish, gray blue	1	1
4-holed hobnail	1	1
Total	**155**	**100**

measurements were converted to "lines"—the historical standard used in the U.S. for producing buttons—and mm, the standard measurement for buttons more commonly employed by archaeologists (Table 4). Button size is referred to in lines throughout this article.

Just over half of the buttons are porcelain Prosser buttons (*terminus post quem* [TPQ]: 1840) (Table 3). Collectors refer to them as "chinas," while historical mail-order catalogs advertised them as "agate" buttons. Although they were manufactured in a wide array of colors and decorations (Sprague 2002), those from the TNCC are relatively uniform (Table 5). All of the Prossers are sew-through buttons, and most are the common "dish" type with a beveled rim. Most of these are four-holed, as opposed to two-holed, sew throughs, though the number of holes does not appear to indicate clothing type for the TNCC assemblage. Where they do vary noticeably is in size, starting as small as 12 lines (n=1) and reaching as large as 36 lines (n=1). The majority, however, measured either 18 or 24 lines. Since Prosser buttons were used to fasten a range of garments worn by adults and children, provenience was especially helpful in identifying the item to which they were once attached.

Table 4 Conversion table of button sizes

Line	Mm
12	7.94
14	9.53
18	11.11
20	12.70
22	14.29
24	15.88
28	17.46
30	19.05
36	22.23
45	28.58

Metal buttons constitute 37% of the buttons (Table 3) and are diverse in terms of size (18–45 lines), attachment type, and specific metal type. Over half were cataloged generically as "metal" (Table 6). The majority of metal buttons advertised in mail-order catalogs were intended as fasteners for men's clothing. Metal two-holed and four-holed buttons were sold as pants fasteners (Pool 1991; Owens 2000:413). Stud buttons were also used for this purpose (Mainfort and Davidson 2006:175). Studs consist of a disk with a post having either a smaller disk or knob at the end. Rather than sewn on, a stud button was inserted into a garment's button hole for fastening (Pool 1991). Two other TNCC artifacts associated with men's pants are the two-piece ball-and-socket snap buttons and rivets. The patent for riveted work-related clothing was issued in 1873; the rivets strengthened seams, thereby increasing the garment's durability (Hall 1992:115; Psota 2002). They were commonly used on men's heavy-duty work pants, including denims. The iron buttons include 23 that are "self-shank" buttons, where the shank is molded as part of the button. Iron buttons were typically lacquered or painted (Luscomb 2006:106), and the ones recovered from the TNCC likely lost their decoration after interment. Similarly, some of the buttons cataloged as iron or metal with shanks may have once been cloth covered and, if so, were typically attached to men's vests and coats (Owens 2000:412; Mainfort and Davidson 2006:196).

Table 6 Metal buttons by attachment type

Material	Type	N	%
Metal	Stud	20	
	2-holed	13	
	Snap	13	
	4-holed	8	
	Shank	4	
	Rivet	3	
	2-holed, japanned	1	
	Indeterminate	1	
	Indeterminate sew through	1	
	Shank, purple stone inlay	1	
	Shank, rhinestone inlay	1	
	Stud, possible cloth covered	1	
	Unspecified	1	
	Subtotal	68	59
Iron	Self shank	23	
	Unspecified	5	
	Shank	5	
	Stud	3	
	1-holed	1	
	Subtotal	37	32
Brass	Shank	5	
	Stud	1	
	Subtotal	6	5
Copper alloy	Embossed bird	1	
	Shank, lead back	1	
	Shank, yellow inlay	1	
	Unspecified	1	
	Subtotal	4	3
	Grand Total	**115**	**100**

Far fewer in number are the brass and copper-alloy buttons. These were costlier than most of the other TNCC buttons and were often used for men's vests or coats, where the buttons would be visible. For example, in 1895 Montgomery Ward (Montgomery Ward & Co. 2008:85) sold Prosser buttons for 3¢ per gross (a dozen dozen, or 144 buttons). This price point is for Prossers measuring 24 lines, one of the most common sizes for Prossers represented in the TNCC assemblage. By comparison, just a dozen of the cheapest brass vest buttons of a comparable size (22 lines) cost 10¢, and the most expensive sold for 18¢ per dozen.

Buttons made of the remaining material classes each constitute about 5% of the total number of buttons (Table 3). The 16 bone buttons, all four-holed sew throughs, were made from the bones of cattle and buffalo (Pool 1991:5–6). These were cheap and used mainly for underwear and to fasten suspenders to men's pants (Owens 2000:410; Luscomb 2006:25). The TNCC bone buttons all came from burials of males and occur in three sizes: 22, 24, and 28 lines. Fourteen sew-through rubber buttons (either 22 or 30 lines) were found with males and females. Although Charles Goodyear received a patent for hard rubber buttons in 1851, none of the ones in this assemblage were marked, indicating that they were produced after the 1870s (Foster and Nance 2002:154). Two women were buried in clothing with the only glass buttons (n=4) recovered from the site. One woman was interred with a pair of opaque white glass buttons with shanks (recovered from her wrists), and the second woman had a pair of black sew-through buttons resting on her pelvis. There are two shell buttons (one with a shank, the other a two-holed fisheye), also referred to as "pearl" buttons (Peacock 1972:40; Luscomb 2006:146,177). Montgomery Ward (Montgomery Ward & Co. 2008:278–280) sold a wide range of men's and boys' shirts with shell buttons in 1895, around the time when the domestic shell-button industry experienced its first boom (Claassen 1994:67). Still, for the time period that the TNCC was in operation, shell buttons were costlier than Prosser buttons (Mainfort and Davidson 2006:171), which make up the bulk of the TNCC assemblage. As with copper-alloy buttons, cost was likely one of the major reasons so few shell buttons were recovered from the site.

Cuff and Collar Closures

Cuff and collar closures from the TNCC are presented in Table 7 and constitute 15% of the assemblage (Table 2). Their detachability was especially useful if one invested in expensive studs or cuff links, which could be used to dress up various shirts or women's shirtwaists. Nearly all of the TNCC collar and cuff studs, however, are the less expensive utilitarian porcelain studs. These are the same as those recovered from the Dallas Freedman's Cemetery and described as consisting of "a flat or slightly domed head, a post, and a slightly larger flat base" (Owens 2000:421). Although the Dallas

Table 7 Cuff and collar closures

Closure Type	F	%	M	%	Total	%
Collar stud, porcelain	6	60	44	75	50	72
Collar stud, metal coil	0	0	1	2	1	1.5
Cuff link, metal	2	20	8	13	10	14
Cuff holder	0	0	5	8	5	7
Cuff link, shell	2	20	0	0	2	3
Cuff stud, wood	0	0	1	2	1	1.5
Total	**10**	**100**	**59**	**100**	**69**	**100**

assemblage includes a wider variety of utilitarian studs, most were made of porcelain. A single metal collar stud of a coil or screw-in type was recovered from the burial of a male.

Of the 10 metal cuff links, only 1 pair was described in detail. The male with the metal collar stud also possessed a pair of copper, lever-top cuff links with stone inlays. There are also five "Paris-type" cuff holders (Foster and Nance 2002:154), all found with four males. Cuff holders were used for securing cuffs to shirt sleeves. One mail-order catalog highlighted their advantages as "to avoid the annoyance of buttoning on your cuffs" and "the convenience of taking off your cuff or putting it on without handling it" (Weinstock, Lubin & Co. 1975:51). Although sold as pairs, only one male possessed a complete set.

Most of the cuff and collar fasteners (84%) were interred with men, although three women were buried wearing porcelain collar studs, and one woman possessed two pairs of cuff links, one metal, one shell, and one unspecified wooden cuff closure. While these kinds of fasteners are commonly assumed to be exclusively for masculine clothing, retailers sold an array of cuff and collar fasteners for women's shirtwaists.

Buckles and Suspender Hardware

There are a total of 35 buckles and fragments of suspender hardware (Table 2). Of these, 23 are cinch buckles, commonly used for securing a tighter fit at the waist of both vests and pants. Most (n=20) were recovered from the burials of males. Two fragments of suspender hardware were part of the clothing ensemble of a woman. Suspenders were used to hold up pants and long underwear until the end of the 19th century, when belts became more popular (Hill 2011:70). The remainder of this subassemblage (n=10) consists of unidentifiable buckles or hardware associated with suspenders or garters (for stockings or socks [James Davidson 2018, elec. comm.]).

Hook-and-Eye Fasteners

The remains of 30 hooks and eyes (6% of the assemblage) were found with five men and two women. These diminutive metal fasteners were commonly used for 19th-century women's clothing, so this relatively low number was unexpected and may in part be due to poor preservation and methods of recovery. That is, although all of the burials were excavated by hand troweling, none of the fill was water screened. At the Dallas Freedman's Cemetery, for instance, most of the hooks and eyes were in fragments, and 32% were found by water screening (Owens 2000:422). Although one male interred at the TNCC had eight hooks and eyes as shirt fasteners, the rest associated with males were probably part of pre-tied bow ties (Owens 2000:422).

Safety Pins

While safety pins are not usually thought of as clothing fasteners, they are included here since they appear to have functioned as such for a number of individuals (Mainfort and Davidson 2006:184). Safety pins were generally used for diapers, although they were identified as fasteners for clothes and shrouds among individuals interred at the Dallas Freedman's Cemetery (Owens 2000:424–427). The majority of safety pins (18 of 23) were found with women, who had between 1 and 3 each. Six men had either one or two safety pins. Unlike some of the clothing fasteners (collar studs, for example), there was no pattern with respect to where the safety pins were found on their bodies. Although herein I present safety pins as purposefully used as clothing

fasteners, it is important to note that whoever dressed the deceased might have used these to adjust clothing, for example, if the decedent lost a substantial amount of weight prior to death.

Remarks

In discerning the sartorial practices of black Houstonians, I consulted the literature on 19th-century dress. Although the bulk of this scholarship focuses on the dress norms of white, middle- to upper-class Americans, these studies proved helpful with the interpretations nonetheless. Illustrations and advertisements of fasteners and garments in period mail-order catalogs helped to determine what was available for purchase by consumers, and what kinds of buttons were intended for specific items of dress. Finally, as suggested above, I consulted other studies of clothing fasteners recovered from cemeteries that were contemporaneous with the TNCC.

Methods of Analysis and Results

Two approaches were employed to analyze the clothing fasteners: (1) by individual burial, intended to associate clothing fasteners with specific clothing ensembles and (2) by aggregating fastener type and frequency, seeking general patterns of fastener use by gender. In both cases of fasteners the proveniences on the body were considered. The results of both methods overlapped and reinforced each other, with the quantitative approach providing an aggregate view of patterns of fastener use, while the case-by-case study helped to refine the interpretations. Since provenience was central to the analysis and interpretations, I begin with a summary of the system of recording finds as they were encountered in burials. This is followed by interpretations of the kinds of clothing in which men and women were interred and then the results of the analysis of the assemblage.

In recording the finds from each burial, archaeologists used seven "zones" for piece plotting, with each representing a specific part of the body (Foster and Nance 2002:113–114): Zone A for the head; Zones B and C for the right and left torso and arms, respectively; Zones D and E for the right and left pelvis and legs, respectively; and Zones F and G for the right and left foot, respectively. For the second part of the analysis, provenience categories were combined groupings of head, torso/arms, pelvis/legs, and feet. Figure 2 presents the TNCC artifacts for women and men based on their recorded proveniences by zone groupings. Most of the fasteners for men and women were recovered from the torso/arms followed by the pelvis/legs, the areas where one might expect clothing fasteners to be attached to garments: that is, along the sternum or down the back, at wrists and necks, and in the waist or pelvis areas. The size distribution for Prosser buttons showed some bimodality for both men and women, with modes at around 18 and 24 lines and fewer buttons in the 20–22 lines range. Thus, for Figure 2, Prossers are divided into "small," measuring from 16 to 21 lines, and "large," from 22 to 36 lines. Figure 2 shows a different distribution of small and large Prossers for men and women, especially in the torso/arms area, with men tending to have more of the larger Prossers and women more of the smaller ones.

In 31 out of 463 artifacts, or 6% of the total, fasteners had no recorded zone or were recorded as "grave fill,"

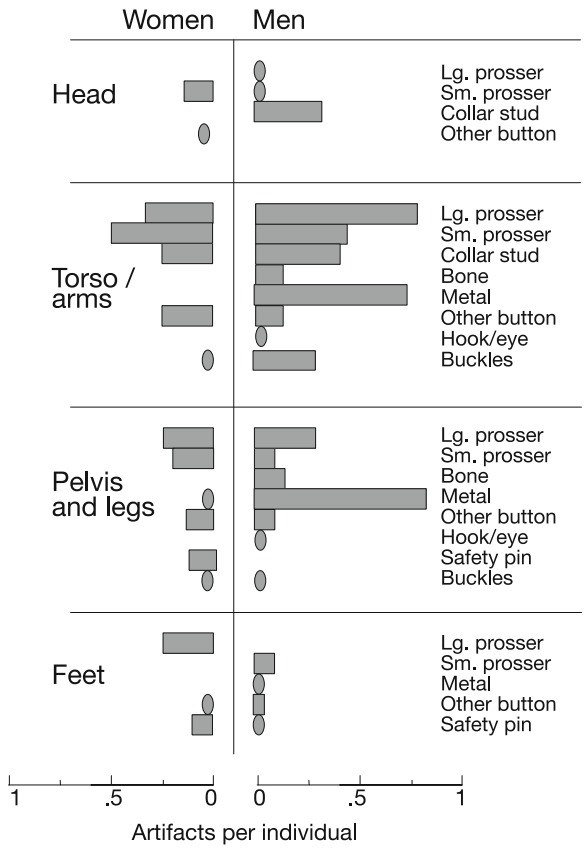

Fig. 2 Average number of artifacts per burial by provenience. (Figure by Sam Wilson, 2018.)

and these were excluded from the quantitative analysis by provenience (but retained for all other analyses).

Reconstruction of Clothing Ensembles by Individual Interment

For the interpretation of outfits, I consulted the field drawings and notes of individual burials, which often provided more specific proveniences for fasteners than the zones recorded for them in the artifact inventory. For example, many of the metal buttons recovered from the torso/arms of men (Fig. 2) were found in the waist or pelvis areas, indicating their use on pants rather than as shirt or vest fasteners. Discerning the clothing ensembles by individuals also helped to illustrate more clearly the reasons menswear employed more fasteners than women's clothes. Even men dressed solely in a pair of pants and a shirt required two sets of buttons and, for some, a cinch buckle, and for most of the men interred at the TNCC their shirts also called for cuff and/or collar closures. Added together, their fastener requirements surpassed those of women.

Interpretations of Women's Clothing

Of the 34 females, it was impossible to ascertain what 47% (n=16) of them were wearing when interred. Only one to two buttons (mainly Prosser buttons) or safety pins were recovered from these burials. Of the remainder (n=18), nearly equal numbers wore one of two outfits: a dress or a skirt and shirtwaist (Table 8) (Fig. 3). Based on the evidence discussed below, the dress in question was very likely a wrapper, or "Mother Hubbard" (Fig. 4). Among American women, the loose-fitting wrapper became a popular alternative to the Victorian fashion of close-fitting womenswear (which necessitated a corset and a number of other undergarments) (Gray 2014). The wrapper is typically described as a yoked dress that hung loosely from the shoulders to the ankles, worn either loose or belted (Mills 1985:65; Blanchard 1995:25; Gray 2014:30–31). It initially made its way into women's wardrobes during the first half of the 19th century. Although skirts with hoops were stylish at the time, women favored wrappers for ease of movement and care, mainly wearing the dress for leisurely daywear or for working around the house and farm (Gray 2014:30,42). Thus, Texas women favored wrappers for everyday wear by the 1830s (Persons 1956:71; Mills 1985:59).

Table 8 Womenswear based on clothing fasteners

Clothing	*N*	%
Dress/wrapper	10	56
Skirt and shirtwaist	4	22
Skirt only	2	11
Shirtwaist only	2	11
Total	**18**	**100**

There is a lack of evidence for corsets (including corset clasps and hooks, bone or steel stays, and eyelets/grommets for lacing). This could be due to funerary practices of preparing women for burial without corsets, an undergarment in which it would, undoubtedly, be difficult to dress a prone body. At the Dallas Freedman's Cemetery, only 9 out of 278 interments identified as female exhibited evidence of corset wear (Owens 2000:419). Still, I suggest that the dresses worn by women interred at the TNCC were wrappers. From 1870 to 1889, women's skirts emphasized fullness at the back supported by a bustle (Mills 1985:120; C. Cunnington and P. Cunnington 1992:177–179; Wilson 2015:275). The bustled skirt was paired with a matching tight-fitting, boned bodice. To achieve the look, women of the "leisure" class wore a series of undergarments: a chemise and underpants; a corset, often followed with a corset cover; one to three petticoats; and a bustle (Wilson 2015:275). When by 1890 the bustle went out of fashion, a corset was still needed to achieve the hourglass silhouette then popular (Wilson 2015:276). In contrast, the wrapper was a corset-less dress. In her study of 19th-century wrappers from Texas, Betty Mills (1985:61) observed that "most wrappers were made with an inner bodice or lining attached at the side seams, and buttoned snugly over the bust." This inner bodice "would provide a feeling of fit without the constriction of a tightly laced corset" (Gray 2014:43). Most wrappers were not fully lined, however. Buttons (or hooks and eyes) were used as fasteners for both the lining and wrapper, and although Mills (1985:61) notes that it was atypical for the fasteners to be visible, period photographs and mail-order catalog illustrations indicate a variety of styles. For example, in 1886 Bloomingdale's sold wrappers that had as many as eight visible buttons as closures for the front of the dress (Bloomingdale Brothers 1998:15) (Fig. 4).

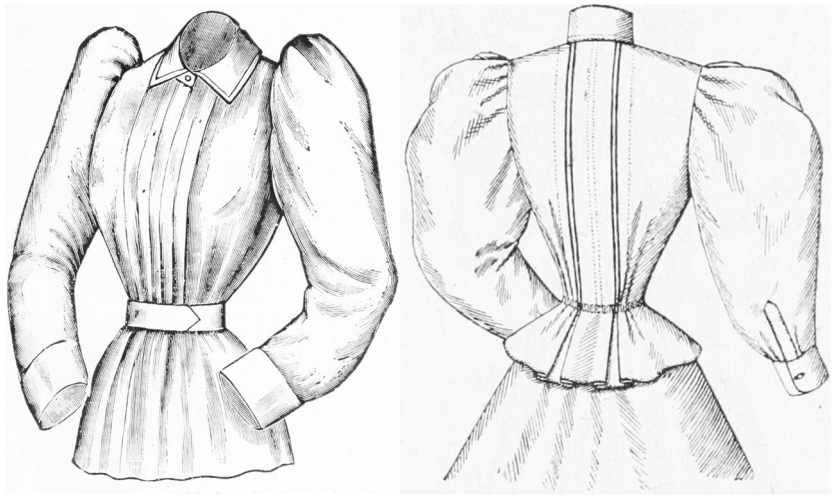

Fig. 3 Illustration of a woman's shirtwaist (T. Eaton Co. 1894).

77. Princess Wrapper, neat patterns, cambric, with two flounces... ..$1 49
78. In Calico $1 25
79. In French Sateen....$2 50, 2 75, 3 25
80. Very pretty Mother Hubbard Wrapper, in Cambric..... .....$1 65
81. In Calico..... ..$1 35
82. In White Lawn.....$2 00, 2 25, 2 50
83. In Sateen,.....$2 25, 2 50, 2 75, 3 00

Fig. 4 Illustration of a princess-style wrapper (*left*) and Mother Hubbard wrapper (*right*) (Bloomingdale Brothers 1988:15).

Wrappers could be made with few fasteners, and where buttons or hooks and eyes were lacking, fabric ties and/or safety pins could suffice. In most cases I identified wrappers based on the presence of three or more buttons (mainly Prossers) recovered from the torso and/or pelvis. The exceptions included one woman who probably wore a dress, based on pairs of hooks and eyes found in a row along her vertebrae, the only fasteners recovered from her burial. Another woman had only two opaque white glass buttons with shanks, one at each wrist. The buttons for each wrapper were of the same material (porcelain, glass, or rubber) and attachment type, though in all but two cases they varied in size. Matching buttons were recovered from the burial of a woman (age ≥50) who wore a wrapper with seven two-holed rubber buttons (30 lines); one was recovered from her head, and the remaining buttons were found scattered over her torso. In the TNCC population it was more typical to find cases for which buttons sizes differed. For example, an adult female of indeterminate years wore a wrapper fastened with plain, four-holed Prosser buttons. One measured 18 lines and was recovered at her neck; five additional four-holed Prossers (24 lines) were found at her waist.

Eight women were interred wearing a skirt and shirtwaist or bodice (Table 8) (Figs. 3, 5), although fasteners for both top and bottom garments were recovered from only four of them. Two other women had only shirtwaist fasteners, and two for a skirt only. Given the popularity of the skirt and shirtwaist/bodice ensemble during the 19th and early 20th centuries, all eight females were very likely similarly attired. The matching skirt and bodice were usually sewn together to form one piece (Wilson 2015:274), but by the 1850s were often worn as separates. The bodice was close fitting with boning "added to darts and seams for structure" (Hunt-Hurst 2015c:271); see also Bradfield (1983:162–228), Blanchard (1995:26), and Wilson (2015:275). Women of lesser means came to favor the separate skirt and bodice, as the latter could be made at home for less than the cost of sewing a full dress. The tops could also be laundered separately (Mills 1985:66). Since bodices, or waists, usually wore out before skirts, the longer use life of the latter made two-piece outfits more economical, and women typically made more than one bodice for every skirt (Mills 1985:66).

The shirtwaist, widely available ready-made by the late 19th century, further popularized separates for women. It was distinguished from the bodice in at least two ways that have helped to inform this study: the shirtwaist lacked boning and, while bodices had small band collars or an open neck covered by a "removable chemisette or lace frill" (Wilson 2015:275), shirtwaists usually had turndown collars similar to those of men's shirts (Mills 1985:72). All of the shirtwaists advertised for sale by Sears Roebuck in 1897 had turndown collars (including detachable ones) and cuffs that buttoned. Shirtwaists were paired with a long skirt, and one popular look was the "Gibson Girl": a white shirtwaist, bow tie, and dark skirt (Fig. 5). Four of the eight women were undoubtedly wearing shirtwaists, as indicated by their cuff and collar closures. The remaining four were either dressed in bodices (which lacked the traditional boning, based on the absence of evidence of it) or shirtwaists with attached collars and cuffs (Sears, Roebuck & Co. 1968).

Although there is no clear-cut evidence that women were interred with undergarments, at a minimum they may have been wearing a knee-length chemise and underpants. Undergarments helped to protect clothing (and corsets) from body odors and oils, resulting in less laundering for garments (Hunt-Hurst 2015b:256).

The skirt-and-shirtwaist ensemble was evidenced by the presence of two groups of fasteners. A shirtwaist was indicated by buttons (these were either Prossers or rubber buttons) or hooks and eyes recovered from the torso/arms. Three women possessed porcelain collar and/or cuff studs; another was interred with two pairs of cuff links and a single cuff link. Additional fasteners recovered from the pelvis or waist were used for fastening a skirt; these included either a cinch buckle and/or one to two buttons, mostly metal, or safety pins. In two instances, no closures for skirts were found, though the determination that both women wore shirtwaists suggests that these were paired with skirts. Conversely, two women likely wore skirts (based on the presence of suspender hardware for one and a cinch buckle and copper button at the waist for the other), but lacked the remains of fasteners for shirtwaists. It is possible that the woman interred with suspenders wore pants, but her burial lacked buttons (including metal buttons that would suggest this). One specific example of the skirt-and-shirtwaist ensemble is a female (age ≥50)

Fig. 5 African American women wearing popular 19th-century clothing, 1890. One woman (*far left*) is dressed in a beltless wrapper, while another (*far right*) sports the "Gibson girl" look of a white shirtwaist, bow tie, and dark skirt. (Figure courtesy of the Missouri State Archives, African American Portrait Collection, Image No. MS339_0129.)

who was interred wearing a shirtwaist with a detachable collar fastened with a porcelain stud that was found at her head. The two four-holed rubber buttons (22 lines) recovered from her torso served to fasten her shirtfront. Her skirt was fastened with a two-holed metal button (painted black, 24 lines) that was found near a cinch buckle from the area of her pelvis.

Interpretations of Men's Clothing

Of the 63 men, the higher number of fasteners recovered from their burials as compared to females resulted in only 8 instances in which there were too few fasteners (one button or safety pin) for reliable clothing interpretations. The remaining 55 men were, at a minimum, dressed in a pair of pants and a shirt, although 18 of these burials contained shirt fasteners only (Table 9). Men's nonwork-related attire during the 19th century consisted of the three-piece suit of trousers, vest, and jacket (Hunt-Hurst 2015a:183). Shirts were considered undergarments (C. Cunnington and P. Cunnington 1992; Murphy 2005:80; Cole 2009:56; Hunt-Hurst 2015b:256–257). In public, men would customarily don a vest and/or jacket rather than be seen in just their shirtsleeves (Turbin 2000:512). Yet, only a minority (n=7, 13%) of interred men had evidence of a vest or coat. For the homegoing held in their honor (Holloway 2002; S. Smith 2010; Stanley 2016), individuals were likely laid to rest in their best clothing for the wake and burial. What the evidence suggests, however, is that "Sunday best" varied between casual, everyday wear and more formal attire.

Pants fasteners (buttons and/or cinch buckles) were found with 37 men, mainly in the vicinity of the lower torso, pelvis, or legs. The majority of the pants buttons

Table 9 Menswear based on clothing fasteners

Clothing	*N*	%
Semiformal or formal shirt, pants	17	31
Casual shirt, pants	11	20
Semiformal or formal shirt only	8	15
Casual shirt only	8	15
Pants only	4	7
Semiformal or formal shirt, pants, vest or jacket	3	5
Semi-formal or formal shirt, vest or jacket	2	4
Casual shirt, pants, vest or jacket	2	4
Total	**55**	**100**

were iron or cataloged generically as metal, though there were some men with combinations of metal and bone or Prosser buttons used as pants fasteners (based on their proveniences). Although pants buttons sold in catalogs were described as for "fly" or "suspender" without specifying size (Sears, Roebuck & Co. 1968:320; Montgomery Ward & Co. 2008:86), one retailer noted in 1891 that 22-line buttons were used (Weinstock, Lubin & Co. 1975:41). However, those identified as pants buttons here varied from 20 to 28 lines and included mainly studs and sew-through and self-shank buttons. A number of men had mismatched pants buttons (two different button styles or sizes), which suggests that their pants had been used for some time and required mending.

Only three men had a sufficient number of buttons for pants with suspenders (three to six for the fly, and six to eight for the suspenders) (Owens 2000:445). This includes one interred man with two unidentifiable buckles recovered from his chest that might be remnants of suspenders. Instead, the cinch buckle, found with over half of the males (n=20) with pants fasteners, was the preferred method for holding up trousers. Save for two exceptions, the relative quality or cost of trousers across burials cannot be determined based solely on the fasteners. The TNCC pants buttons, and those sold in period catalogs, are utilitarian. What mainly distinguished a more expensive pair of pants from its cheaper counterparts was the quality and cost of the fabric used and whether the pants were tailor-made. The exceptions are two cases where men were very likely buried in work pants, as evidenced by metal rivets. The fasteners associated with shirts, however, proved more useful.

During the 19th century, men's shirts were pullovers that opened at the front, back, or both (Davidson and Mainfort 2008:421; Hill 2011:50,53). Thus, only one to three buttons, on average, were needed to fasten shirtfronts; a single shirt stud sufficed as a fastener for the back. The "coat front" shirt, today's button-down, was not introduced until near the end of the century (C. Cunnington and P. Cunnington 1992:189; Shep and Cairou 1999:8; Hill 2011:53). Given the TNCC's official closing in 1904 and that most men were interred with one or two shirt buttons (not including collar or cuff studs), nearly all were likely wearing pullover shirts.

In general, shirts were either formal or causal, with the latter encompassing shirts for recreational activities and work. Dress shirts were typically made of white linen (C. Cunnington and P. Cunnington 1992:187,191) and required the use of separable collars and cuffs (Fig. 6). Only the wealthy could afford tailor-made, formal shirts with sewn-on collars. Invented in 1827 (Turbin 2000:508), the detachable collar eventually enjoyed widespread popularity (Murphy 2005:80; Cole 2009:41). With this innovation, soiled collars, along with detachable cuffs, could be laundered separately from the shirt. This feature also extended the use life of shirts and gave men more flexibility in their wardrobes through swapping out cuffs and collars for the same shirt. In contrast, shirts for everyday wear were usually produced with sewn-on cuffs and turndown collars (Turbin 2000:514) (Fig. 6). Shirts intended for work, in particular, were often loose fitting and made of dark-colored fabrics, especially cotton and wool, to hide stains (Shep and Cairou 1999:9). As a group, casual shirts were referred to as "negligee," "overshirts," or "outing shirts" (Sears, Roebuck & Co. 1968:214–216; Hill 2011:49). Some "soft," or negligee shirts, were available with sewn-on cuffs and a collar band for attaching a separable collar (Hill 2011:53), while Sears Roebuck sold colored and striped outing shirts for "bicycling, boating, fishing, and general wear," and recommended that they be worn with white detachable cuffs and collars (Sears, Roebuck & Co. 1968:214; Cole 2009:44). Thus there was a midrange, semiformal option for men, although the elite considered colored and striped shirts as working-class attire until the last decade of the 19th century (Cole 2009:44).

Considering the above, the presence (and numbers) or absence of collar and cuff closures helped to identify the general kind of shirt (semiformal/formal vs. casual) an individual wore when interred. Shirt fasteners were not found in the burials of four men that had evidence for pants only. Of the remaining 51 adult males, 30 (59%) wore either a semiformal or formal shirt. Nine of them were undoubtedly wearing formal shirts with both separable collars and cuffs, as each possessed closures for the latter. Four of these nine men were the sole individuals buried with cuff holders, and they also had hooks and/or eyes that were probably for pre-tied bow ties. The remaining 21 men wore a shirt with at least a detachable collar, as indicated by one or two collar studs per burial. Since none of these males was interred with cuff fasteners, they may have been wearing a semiformal outing shirt with sewn-on cuffs and a separable collar.

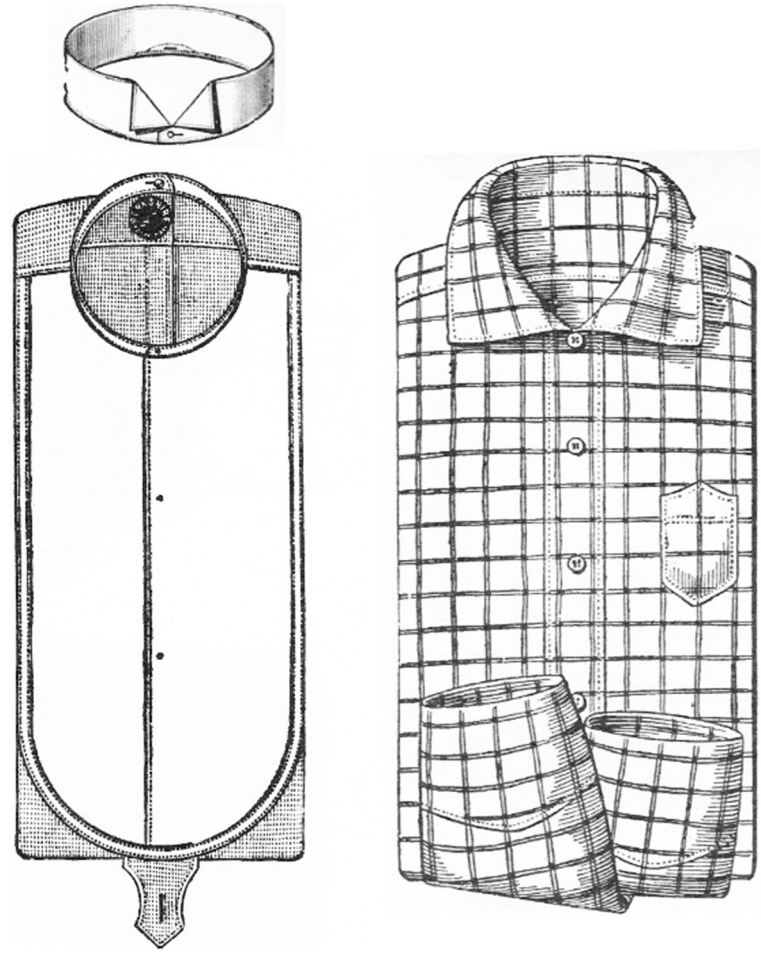

Fig. 6 Man's dress shirt with detachable collar (*left*) and pull-over casual shirt with sewn-on turndown collar and cuffs (*right*), 1891 (Weinstock, Lubin & Co. 1975:53–54).

Regardless of the general type of shirt, most of the shirtfronts were fastened with Prosser sew-through buttons ranging from 14 to 28 lines, although the majority of these shirt buttons are 18 lines. As with pants buttons, a number of men had Prosser buttons that varied in size, suggesting that their shirts were mended at some point. Whoever replaced the original buttons used plain white Prossers so that the buttons at least matched in color and style, if not in size. As an alternative to Prossers, a small number of men had rubber or bone buttons as shirt fasteners.

It was difficult to discern whether any of the men wore underwear, which was popular during this time period. Prosser and bone buttons were commonly used as closures for underwear. Elastic waists did not come into use until the second half of the 20th century. The telltale evidence for long-handle underwear—a single button at each ankle (Mainfort and Davidson 2006:196)—was lacking across all of the burials of men. It is possible, however, that a portion of the Prosser buttons, especially those recovered from the waist, were actually for button-fly drawers rather than shirts.

There were only seven men whose clothing-related fasteners included evidence for a shirt, pair of pants, and potentially one additional garment, a vest or jacket/coat (Table 9). Possible vests and coats were interpreted based on button size and material type. Vest buttons measured 24 lines, while coat and jacket buttons were 30 lines or larger (Sears, Roebuck & Co. 1968; Weinstock, Lubin & Co. 1975; Claassen 1994:78; Montgomery Ward & Co. 2008). Unlike shirt and pants buttons, those for outerwear were made to be seen and thus were typically more decorative. Still, the evidence is not concrete, since in most cases there was only a single button that met the criteria of a vest or coat fastener; both garments were typically fastened with

multiple buttons (although some coats lacked buttons or had merely one). Three men had a single brass button (either 24 or 28 lines) recovered from each of their torsos. One male had 24-line metal stud buttons recovered from his chest, but these could have been additional pants fasteners. Three additional men were interred with one coat button each: a 45-line copper button, a 36-line metal stud button recorded as possibly cloth-covered, and a Prosser button that also measured 36 lines.

Remarks

Of the individuals whose clothing could be interpreted with respect to the fasteners present, the ensembles varied minimally: men were laid to rest mainly in pants and shirts, while women wore either a dress, likely a wrapper, or shirtwaist and skirt (Figs. 3, 4, 5). The least expensive fasteners, including Prosser buttons, porcelain collar and cuff studs, and utilitarian metal and bone pants buttons, were prevalent and might suggest that their attire was made of less costly fabrics. For women, the lack of evidence for corsets and bustles, the undergarments needed for the most fashionable and costly women's wear during the late 19th century, suggests, but alone does not prove, that their garments were inexpensive. For men, although just over half (30 out of 55) wore semiformal or formal shirts, most lacked vests or coats.

General Quantitative Characteristics of the Assemblage

For the TNCC, not only were men dressed in garments that, typically, had more buttons, the buttons they had were more diverse with respect to material. The mosaic plot in Figure 7 shows, in the left column, that 73% of women's buttons were Prossers. The right column illustrates that men had buttons made of a greater diversity of materials. The mosaic plot also shows, by the width of the columns, the relative number of buttons buried with females (n=72) and males (n=234).

I was also interested in whether the sizes of buttons differed between women and men, which might relate to gender-specific garments, yet they were fairly uniform, as both used buttons ranging mainly from 18 to 24 lines. Figures 8 and 9 are box plots showing the size ranges of buttons of various materials for men and women. The box plots show that Prosser buttons tend to be a little larger for men than women, with the median size for men being 24 lines vs. 22 lines for women (the mean values are 21.3 lines for men and 20.4 lines for women). For both women and men, however, the button sizes between 18 and 24 lines are the most popular, accounting for 50% of all Prosser buttons for both. The majority of these Prossers, measuring 18–24 lines, were interpreted as men's shirt fasteners or women's shirtwaist and dress fasteners. For men's metal buttons, the 25% and 75% quantiles are 20 and 24, with the median size metal button measuring 24 lines. For men's iron buttons, the 25% and 75% quantiles are 22 and 27, with a median size of 24. Although diverse in terms of attachment type, their proveniences in the torso or pelvis areas indicated their use as pants fasteners.

Metal buttons, in particular, are more strongly correlated with males; only eight of the 115 metal buttons were associated with women. This pattern is similar to that of the Dallas Freedman's Cemetery, where 72% of adult males (n=258) were dressed in clothing that included brass, copper, iron, and white-metal buttons (n=1,714) (Owens 2000:413). At the TNCC, metal buttons were found in about equal numbers around the torso and pelvis (Fig. 2). Since the TNCC metal buttons are more varied with respect to attachment type than those made of other materials, by extension men possessed a greater range of button types.

Comparison with other Cemetery Assemblages

I compared the TNCC sample with those from other cemeteries to assess whether the general patterns for fastener use by gender varied across sites. These sites were chosen for comparison because of their geographical proximity and contemporaneity. Also, the quality of the excavations, their sample sizes, and the detailed technical reports for each project made them apt comparative cases. Perhaps the most important site for comparison is the Dallas Freedman's Cemetery mentioned previously. This large, urban black cemetery was used between 1869 and ca. 1907 (Peter et al. 2000). Most of the 1,151 burials could be separated into three phases: early (1869–1884), middle (1885–1899), and late (1900–1907). The artifacts from this cemetery are similar to those from the TNCC (Peter et al. 2000; Davidson 2004). The Cedar Grove Cemetery in Arkansas was a rural African American graveyard used from about 1900 to 1915 (Rose 1985; Davidson and Mainfort 2008:422). Two rural white cemeteries are also considered: the Becky

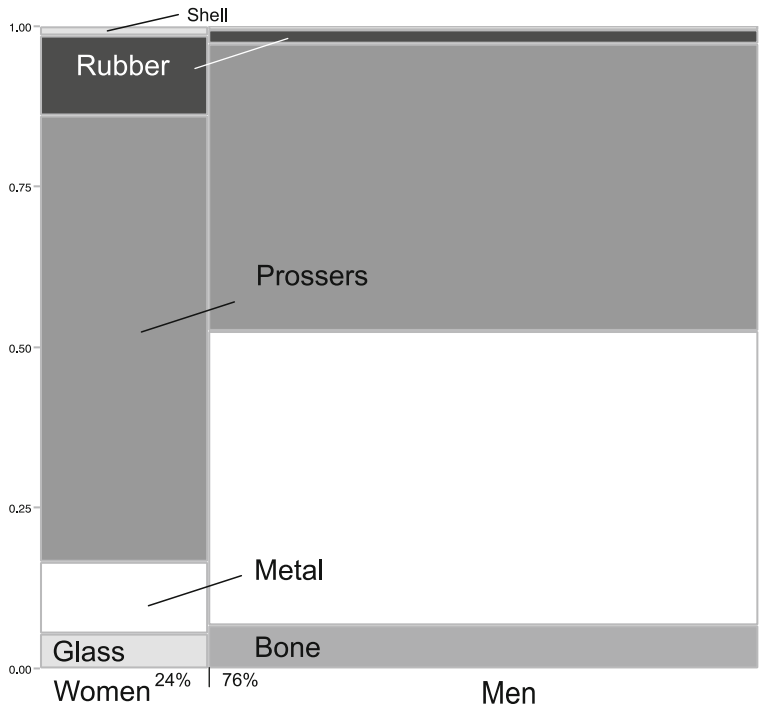

Fig. 7 Mosaic plot of button material by sex. (Figure by Sam Wilson, 2018.)

Wright and the Eddy cemeteries (ca. 1870–1900) in Arkansas (Mainfort and Davidson 2006).

Figure 10 uses a vertical scale of the average number of clothing fasteners per interment and shows a very notable characteristic of the TNCC population. Compared to the other cemeteries there is a relatively low number of clothing fasteners per burial. Both men and women had fewer artifacts than any of their contemporaries. This may reflect, in part, the difficult economic straits of black Houstonians, an observation buttressed by the kinds of fasteners and likely clothing ensembles represented. In terms of numbers of artifacts, the TNCC's closest comparison is with Cedar Grove, where black sharecroppers were interred (Rose 1985). Overall, for all sites, the clothing ensembles of men employed more buttons, buckles, and cuff and collar fasteners.

Black Houstonians and the Politics of Dress

Appearances mattered to African Americans, who during slavery clearly understood the role that rationed clothes played in naturalizing their status as property (Camp 2002; Klassen 2004:51; Sanders 2011). Over half of the individuals whose clothing fasteners were analyzed for this study were born enslaved. They were likely among those who rejected the garments they wore laboring in the big house and fields for clothing they purchased, embellished, or made, clothing that

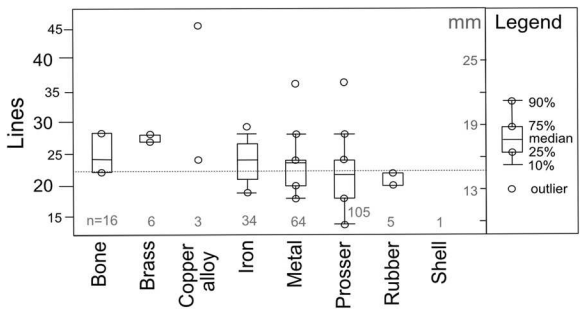

Fig. 8 Box plot of men's buttons by material and size. (Figure by Sam Wilson, 2018.)

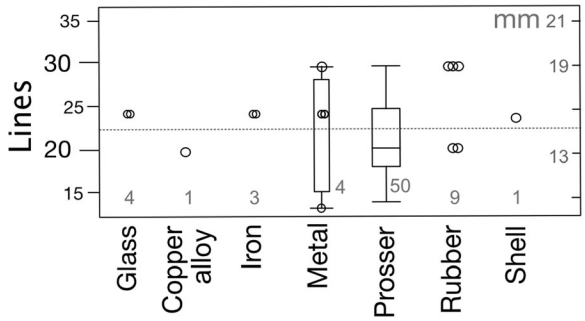

Fig. 9 Box plot of women's buttons by material and size. (Figure by Sam Wilson, 2018.)

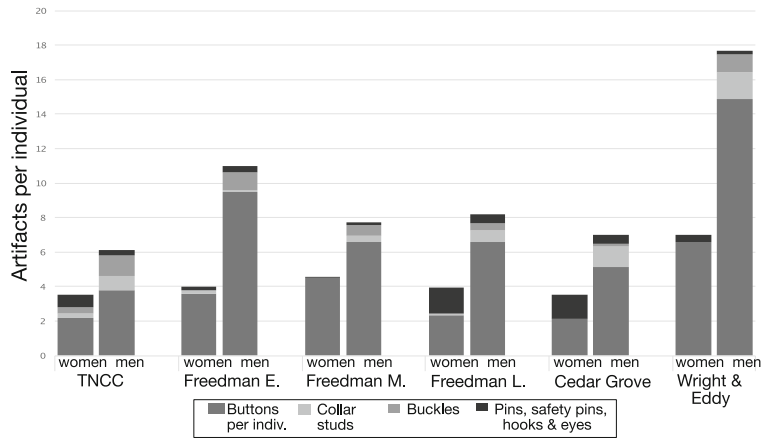

Fig. 10 Comparison of the TNCC clothing fasteners with those from contemporaneous cemeteries. (Figure by Sam Wilson, 2018.)

challenged whites' expectations of what they were fit to wear (S. White and G. White 1998:5–36; Camp 2002; B. Thomas and L. Thomas 2004). Even decades after emancipation, for African Americans the roles and meanings of clothing still echoed with the legacy of slavery. At the same time, expanding consumer markets and the desire to improve their lot in the segregated South engendered shifts in their dress practices and the ideologies that shaped them. In the discussion that follows, I consider black Houstonians as consumers and the ways they framed their aspirations for equal treatment and respectability through dress. Although the TNCC evidence indicates that few, if any, of the individuals interred possessed the means to purchase expensive garb, I do not suggest that their consumer practices can be fully explained on the basis of their economic oppression (Cook et al. 1996:56). Instead, shopping as a "meaningful action" (Cook et al. 1996) positions these consumers as historical actors who sought to challenge dominant ideologies regarding gender, race, and class. Even with limited means, consuming clothing offered one way in which to do so.

Freedman's Town during the late 19th century was well on its way to becoming the heart of black Houston, as residents attended their own churches and schools, participated in civic organizations, and established businesses. Within this context of racial uplift, with a burgeoning black middle class, African Americans across the class spectrum undoubtedly held out hope that the city still offered opportunities for socioeconomic mobility and self-determination that were altogether lacking in the countryside. Yet, this was also a point in time when the advances achieved during Reconstruction were rolled back and racial segregation was already entrenched. Although consumer spaces were also suffused with white supremacy (Mullins 1999), African Americans were practiced consumers, as evidenced by the mass-produced goods regularly recovered from their rural farmsteads, urban home sites, and cemeteries. Previous archaeological research on consumption is helpful in unravelling what inspired black Houstonians to purchase either the mostly mundane clothing fasteners to make garments or the ready-made wear then available in stores and by mail order.

Paul Mullins (2011:135) defines consumption as "the acquisition of things to confirm, display, accent, mask, and imagine who we are and who we wish to be," and further notes that "consumption is a continual albeit largely unexpressed process of self-definition and collective identification." That is, rather than interpret commodities as reflecting a static, essentialized identity, Mullins (1999:21, 2004) conceptualizes the act of consumption as "a social negotiation focused on desire." This is similar to Wurst and McGuire's (1999) assertion that shopping is best understood as a socializing process that is entangled with social reproduction, rather than a reflection of essentialized identities. Using clothing as my main line of evidence, I suggest that black Houstonians engaged in consumerism as a means to express their desires for respectability and equality, an interpretation akin to Mullins's (1999) emphasis on their aspirations for citizenship. Their tactics were twofold: to negotiate the contradiction of their legal status as free, yet unequal to whites, through "consumer citizenship" (Mullins 1999), and, through their precarious position in a racially exclusive marketplace, to purchase fasteners and clothing that materialized their desires for respectability (Higginbotham 1993; Klassen 2004).

Freedmen's Town offered hope to the masses of formerly enslaved African Americans who migrated there and a chance to reconfigure their identities in a post-emancipation Southern society. Urban centers seemed to offer better opportunities for advancement than sharecropping, yet the growing tides of racial segregation and economic oppression increasingly constrained their abilities to achieve it. Unlike most movable consumer goods, the clothes that people wore circulated in public spaces, and black Houstonians were highly conscious of the relationships among dress, appearance, social position, and worthiness. Despite the fact that white society deemed them unfit for fashionable attire, African Americans were invested in the prevailing ideologies regarding appropriate dress for men and women (Klassen 2004). Yet the TNCC evidence also indicates that black Houstonians waged a discourse counter to anti-black stereotypes regarding their appearance and behavior that also spoke to their longings for recognition as respectable, modest, and worthy of advancement.

Victorian-era clothing was simultaneously raced, classed, and gendered. The corset and bustled skirt and white-collared shirts were normalized as the material symbols of white, middle- and upper-class ideals of femininity and masculinity. White well-to-do women wore clothing that was "visibly uneconomical" and that constricted movement to such a degree that it communicated leisure and vulnerability, not labor (Hall 1992:125). For men, collars were historically linked to high status, as laborers, shopkeepers, and artisans went collarless (Turbin 2000:509). White collars soiled easily, and, as Michael Murphy (2005:80) observed in his study of white masculinity and collars from 1880 to 1910, "collars publicly testified to the cleanliness of the hidden body and its conformity to prescribed norms of deportment." Only privileged males were able to don tailored white shirts with collars as their everyday wear.

Black Houstonians were attuned to these hegemonic ideologies of dress. While they resided in black neighborhoods, their working lives put them in close contact with whites. By 1880, 84% of black Houstonians were employed as domestics or in unskilled and semiskilled jobs (Beeth and Wintz 1992:24). Thus, their days were spent wearing clothes that represented the inequities of the labor market and, more broadly, racial and economic oppression. Whites drew upon this attire as one basis for reproducing black racial stereotypes that equated blackness with slovenly appearance, poverty, and labor unfit for whites (Litwack 1998:330; Klassen 2004:44). Yet African Americans also attached to clothing meanings that variously resisted and aligned with the dominant social conventions encoded in garments. If "consumption decisions are a key component in the construction of personal and group identity" (Cook et al. 1996:57), what were those meanings, and how did black Houstonians produce identity engendered through their desires for respect and equality by consuming clothing?

Although shopping was one activity over which consumers had some control (Cook et al. 1996:56), racism and economic disenfranchisement circumscribed the purchases African Americans were able to make; not all choices were equal or possible (Wurst and McGuire 1999:193; Mullins 2011:135). Despite their hardships, however, black Houstonians variously invested in at least one presentable clothing ensemble reserved for church and special occasions (S. White and G. White 1998:163–164). For many, including those buried at the TNCC, these were also the garments in which they were laid to rest. They were attentive to what was fashionable, as indicated, for example, by the skirts and shirtwaists worn by women and the shirts with detachable collars sported by men. Still, the mundane fasteners and the pattern of mismatched buttons found on individual garments suggest that the clothes people wore were not elaborate and had suffered some wear and tear. These were not clothing styles that fully emulated the dress of wealthy whites, nor were they meant to be. In dressing up, black Houstonians were not in denial of their working-class, black subjectivity, but instead mobilized their aspirations around respectability: possessing the cultural capital to know what it meant to present oneself as modest and proper men and women. Evelyn Higginbotham (1993:188) conceptualizes African Americans' politics of respectability as a subversive move aimed at challenging the "scientific" racism of the time and as "essential to dignity and racial self-help." Black women, in particular, faced dealing with stereotypes borne out of slavery that construed them as either asexual "mammies," best suited to serving the needs of whites, or as hypersexualized "Jezebels" (Collins 2000; Flewellen 2018). For them, "appearances were especially fraught with volatile meanings, as the line

between seeming overly sexual or appearing presumptuously dressed above one's station was a fine one" (Klassen 2004:42,51). Thus, African Americans imbued their humble buttons and collar studs, their wrappers, and other garments with the possibilities for challenging and transcending inequities, while simultaneously defining themselves as virtuous daughters, capable fathers, upright sons, and dutiful mothers, the masculine and feminine roles routinely denied them in the worldviews maintained by whites. Although they existed both within and outside consumer spaces, African Americans adhered to consumer discipline as a means to disrupt "dominant definitions of black subjectivity" (Mullins 1999:154).

Laboring in low-wage jobs and experiencing the violence and oppression wrought by Jim Crow left few venues for advancement for black Texans. Their consumer agency was severely tested, and even though individuals engaged variously in buying clothes and clothing-related commodities, consumption patterns were evident at the TNCC. The clothing fasteners were chiefly among the least expensive sold, and there was a general lack of evidence of three-piece suits and dresses trimmed with rows of fancy glass buttons. What was present, for both men and women, was the remains of clothing that they wore in life away from the workplace, their best effort in marshalling a presentable appearance that contributed to their sense of who they wished to be. I agree with Mullins's (1999:188–189) statement that "the material world does not so much reflect what society was like but how consumers hoped it would be." Dressed in their best skirts and shirtwaists, and clean, linen shirts, they attended church and social functions, and strolled around Emancipation Park, desiring to project a sense of worth and respectability to both black and white audiences. They sought to define themselves as deserving of just treatment and materialized their hopes that equality might exist even for one who cleaned houses or labored as a porter. The most fashionable styles were beyond the reach of these men and women, yet they nonetheless demonstrated their cultural competencies in dominant Victorian dress codes with their sartorial choices. In doing so, this community of consumers embarked on a visible campaign that challenged white Victorian norms regarding the relationship among respectability, dress, and race, class, and gender. That in death they were dressed in the very clothing that once symbolized their aspirations for a better world is also telling, as they met their maker robed in garments that represented an honorable and pious life lived.

Moving forward: The Broader Applicability of the Results

Although the clothing fasteners considered here are associated with African American urbanites, the results of this study are still more broadly applicable. Not only are the fastener types among the most common recovered from 19th- and early 20th-century sites, but this study demonstrates that most were used for their intended purposes: cuff and collar closures were recovered from wrists and near heads, metal buttons for men's pants were in areas corresponding to the lower waist and pelvis, and so on. Even though a number of garments were likely homemade or mended at some point, seamstresses selected button types that generally corresponded with how period mail-order catalogs advertised their uses. Moreover, the secondary literature on clothing has provided additional supporting evidence of the results. In cases that prove exceptional, for example, a metal button and cinch buckle used as skirt fasteners, the anomalies are nonetheless instructive. Artifacts are ambiguous, and people have consistently used them in idiosyncratic ways; as a result, defining absolute boundaries of fastener use by gender did not pan out. Indeed, some widely used fasteners, including Prosser buttons and collar studs, were marketed to both men and women. Thus, in using the results of this research for other assemblages, the suggestion is to consider overlapping spheres of plausible uses of each fastener type by gender.

The general patterns that were identified and that are supported by the results of other cemetery studies include the following: (1) menswear employed more clothing fasteners than women's, (2) metal and bone buttons, cinch buckles, and cuff and collar closures correlate more strongly with menswear, and (3) women largely wore garments (skirts, shirtwaists, and dresses) with Prosser buttons, while for men they were mainly used for shirts. More specifically, utilitarian metal buttons (snaps, self-shanks, studs, and sew throughs) of from 18 to 28 lines, along with cinch buckles and rivets, were more likely for men's pants. More women used safety pins than men, possibly because these could secure dresses (especially

wrappers) and skirts in areas that were less visible than on men's shirtfronts and pants. Although more hooks and eyes were recovered from male burials from the TNCC, other studies suggest that these were normally used for women's garments (Owens 2000). There is less certainty with respect to button size: 18- and 24-line buttons were the most typical button sizes for both men and women, and those measuring between 14 and 28 lines were advertised for a variety of uses. However, there were specific button types and sizes that appear to correspond with particular kinds of men's outerwear. These included 24-line metal buttons for vests (which would likely be cloth-covered, brass, or copper alloy) and, in general, buttons measuring 30 lines and over were used for men's coats.

Conclusion

The main goal of this study was to discern potential gendered patterns of clothing-fastener use that could assist in analyzing similar data from other sites. The results should be used as an additional source along with other relevant ones, such as period mail-order catalogs and the prescriptive literature on dress, and the secondary literature on fashion. Clothing fasteners from burials were chosen for this study since, in practice, people did diverge from the social norms of dress and used fasteners in unexpected ways. Since the fasteners were piece-plotted for each burial, their proveniences, especially for buttons, were essential to interpreting the kinds of garments to which they were once attached. The results generally aligned with other lines of evidence consulted, including the interpretations of clothing fasteners recovered from contemporaneous cemetery sites. Yet the few cases that proved exceptional are a reminder of the ambiguity of material culture and the agency that individuals expressed in choosing buttons and other closures for attire and adornment. For instance, one male was buried with 26, 18-line Prosser buttons that clustered near his neck; far too many for a shirt, this cache may have been a necklace strung with buttons. In general, however, as black Houstonians struggled to gain a foothold in segregationist Texas, shedding their work clothes for their Sunday best served as a means of troubling the prevailing norms of whiteness and dress. Despite clothing's limited capacity for effecting social changes, African Americans used it, when possible, to collectively define themselves as modest, respectable, and with the means and desires to consume the mainstream fashions increasingly available to the masses.

Although buttons, buckles, and other fasteners are nearly always found on sites, clothing and fashion remain relatively understudied. A review of the archaeological literature for dress practices among African Americans following emancipation, in particular, yielded few results. Most of the studies were summary descriptions found in the gray literature, but little in the way of interpretation of what the clothing meant. The research presented here can aid in the initial analytical step needed to begin making sense of an assemblage of clothing fasteners. Unlocking the meanings of these ubiquitous small finds can lend insight into the roles of dress in socialization, to communicate identity, and, given its embeddedness in relations of power, how people variously maintained, negotiated, and contested the status quo through the clothes they wore in life as well as in death.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The author acknowledges no known conflict of interest influencing the contents of this article.

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