

The Dark History of Sunglasses

Sunglasses have a dark history, but a brilliant future. The history of sunglasses can be traced back to Roman Emperor Nero who watched the gladiator competitions through polished light emerald green gems held up to his eyes.

The invention of sunglasses was somewhere between 1268 and 1289. A visual historical recording of early sunglasses is a painting done by Tommaso da Modena in 1352. The person in the painting was wearing sunglasses. This was the first painting of a subject in sunglasses and many more were to follow as it became a fashionable symbol of distinction or honor.

Around the twelfth century and before 1430, sunglasses were worn by Judges in the Courts of China. The smoky quartz, flat-glassed panes were not used as protection from the sun. They were used to conceal any expression in their eyes to keep from giving away the outcome of their decisions. Prescription sunglasses were developed in Italy in 1430 and were later used by the Chinese Judges.

By the 1600's people began to realize the benefits of prescription glasses as helping the elderly to see better and the motto "A Blessing to the Aged" came into being in 1629. It was the motto of an English eyeglasses manufacturer, Spectacle Makers Company.

In the mid 18th Century, James Ayscough developed blue and green corrective lenses which began the use of sunglasses for correcting optical impairments.

The development of glasses and sunglasses continued through the years. Problems in keeping eyeglasses on the face or propped on the nose led to experiments. Glasses frames had been made from leather, bones and metal and were propped on the nose. Sidepieces began as silk strips of ribbon that looped around the ears. Instead of loops, the Chinese added ceramic weights to the ends of the ribbons. Solid sidepieces were finally invented by Edward Scarlett in 1730. Benjamin Franklin's invention of bifocal lenses followed in 1780.

By the 20th Century, sunglasses were used to protect the eyes from the sun. In 1929 Sam Foster began selling his protective sunglasses at Woolworth stores on the boardwalk at the beaches in Atlantic City and New Jersey. His Foster Grants were the first mass-produced sunglasses and they began the trend of sunglasses for fashion.

In the 1930's the Army Air Corps asked Bausch & Lomb to develop sunglasses that would efficiently reduce high-altitude sun glare for pilots. Bausch & Lomb came

up with sunglasses that had a dark green tint that absorbed light through the yellow spectrum.

Edward H. Land had invented the Polaroid filter and by 1936 he was using it in the making of sunglasses and soon, sunglasses became "cool." Movies stars began wearing sunglasses as a statement and to hide behind. Aviator glasses became popular with the movie stars and the general public in 1937 after Ray Ban developed the anti-glare sunglasses using polarization. The longer lens was created to give more protection to pilots' eyes from the light reflecting off their control panels.

By the 1970's Hollywood stars and fashion designers made a huge impact on the sunglasses market. Clothing designers and stars put their names on glasses and sunglasses and everyone had to have them.

In 2007, stars are still hiding behind their oversized designer sunglasses, making fashion statements and protecting their eyes from the harmful effects of the Ultra Violet (UV) rays of the sun. With modern technology and improvements, sunglasses continue to evolve. We have gone from holding green gems up to our eyes to watch Gladiator sports to Oakley's 2004 sunglasses with digital audio players built in. What's next?