



## The Language of Fashion

### Sartorial Eponyms

The world of fashion and comfortable dress has spawned many words derived from people and places, words which are called eponyms. Today, of course, we have designer labels but before that Levis, from Levi Strauss who found himself with a large inventory of blue denim which he had hoped to sell to California Gold Rush miners as tenting, were synonymous with hard-wearing denim jeans. Denim is also an eponym, the blue serge was originally manufactured in Nimes, France where it was termed '*serges de nimes*'. Dungarees, or at least the thick cotton cloth from which they were made, were first sold in the market next to Dungari Killa, since renamed Fort George, in Mumbai, India. Even jeans are eponymous as they are named after the French name for Genoa, Italy, '*Genes*'. The term pants comes from pantaloons, a corruption of an old Italian comedic character who wore baggy trousers and also gave us the name pantomime.

Hats are a rich source of eponyms, the Stetson was manufactured by the John B. Stetson Company of St. Joseph, Missouri. The trilby hat, ubiquitous through the 30's and 40's, was originally made from rabbit hair felt and was worn in the debut of the play Trilby, based on George du Maurier's 1894 novel, similarly the Fedora also started life as a play, written by Victorien Sardou and starring Sarah Bernhardt, prettily wearing the hat in her role in 1889. The bowler hat is more prosaic, being produced in 1849 by the London hat-makers Thomas and William Bowler. The homburg was introduced to London society by Edward VII after a visit to Bad Homburg in Germany where he bought the hat. The Panama, just to confuse matters, was made in Ecuador and then shipped to Panama for export where it became very popular in Asia and the U.S.A.

Circumstances can often produce clothes. The Duke of Wellington was looking for hard-wearing but comfortable cavalry boots which could be worn on or off a horse; the result was the Wellington boot, originally made of leather they were mass-produced in rubber after Charles Goodyear perfected vulcanization of that material. The bitter cold of a Ukrainian winter suffered by the troops in the Crimean war resulted in the Balaclava, the Raglan overcoat, made without shoulder seams and named after the British commander, and the Cardigan, named after another British officer who adhered to the principle of layering. Similarly we can see how the island of Jersey was climatically more suited to producing the knitted garment rather than, say, Bermuda shorts or an Hawaiian shirt. Responding more to the political climate, Elizabeth Miller designed a garment which was popularized by the suffragette Amelia Bloomer and known as bloomers. The Knickerbockers were a figment of Washington Irving's imagination in his fictional History of New York but soon came to represent the old-fashioned Dutch of the area and their penchant for knee breeches; from that is derived the British slang 'knickers'. The leotard was made famous by the French acrobat Jules Leotard, the subject of the song 'The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze'.

Coats also have eponyms in abundance, the formal Inverness coat comes from the Scottish city while the Ulster is made from Northern Irish tweed. Tweed itself has a semi-eponymous history. The cloth was actually known as twill, or tweel in Scotland; in 1830 a London merchant received a letter from Scotland in which he misread tweel as tweed. Thinking that this was a brand name for a local product, named after the River Tweed, he advertised it as such and the name Tweed has since stuck. The Chesterfield coat was born in conjunction with the lounge suit and the Chesterfield sofa, all welcome, no doubt, to men wanting to relax. And of course we mustn't forget the mackintosh, although it should be the macintosh the alternate spelling is winning ground to avoid confusion with the computer. Charles Macintosh invented a means to waterproof cloth in 1829, given the weather in England he probably did as much as anybody to usher in an era of greatness for the U.K.

Sources: [The Wearing of Hats Fashion History](#)  
["An Introduction to Textile Terms"](#)  
[The Materials Science and Engineering of Clothing](#)

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Cravats were first sported by Croatian mercenaries recruited by King Louis XIV. Parisian socialites were much taken by the adornment corrupting Croat to cravate. The cravats were made of soft muslin which originated in Mosul in present day Iraq.