

A Brief History of Culottes

Culottes, which is a french term to describe knee length britches for men, first appeared in the late 1500's. They were primarily worn by aristocratic men across Europe, and were popularized during the reign of Henry III. Culottes were normally closed and fastened around the knee, either by buttons, straps or draw string. Military uniforms incorporated culottes, with the lower leg being covered by either stockings, leggings, or knee high boots. Since then, the word and garment have morphed in what is now known as a split skirt for women, which refers to any garment that hangs like a skirt, but is split in two, like a pant. The female version of the culotte first appeared in the early 20th century. While the design made it easier for women to take part in daily physical activities, it was paramount to uphold the illusion of the skirt, making it customary for culottes to have pleats of a wrap around skirt to disguise the pant element. The first woman to outwardly wear pant-inspired culottes was Elsa Schiaparelli in 1931.

In contrast, the sans-culottes, which is French for "without knee breeches", was a term applied to the lower classes in France during the French Revolution. These people wore trousers instead of culottes, which symbolized not just a financial divide, but a political divide, as well. Sans-culottism referred to an ideology that believed all men were equal, as well as personal ownership of land and other property. They also believed in direct democracy and taxes on the rich. Although separated by stature, the sans-culottes were not necessarily poor. The militant sans-culottes were often skilled workers of the middle class. Nevertheless, due to their vendetta- like nature, the sans-culottes were often seen as savage.