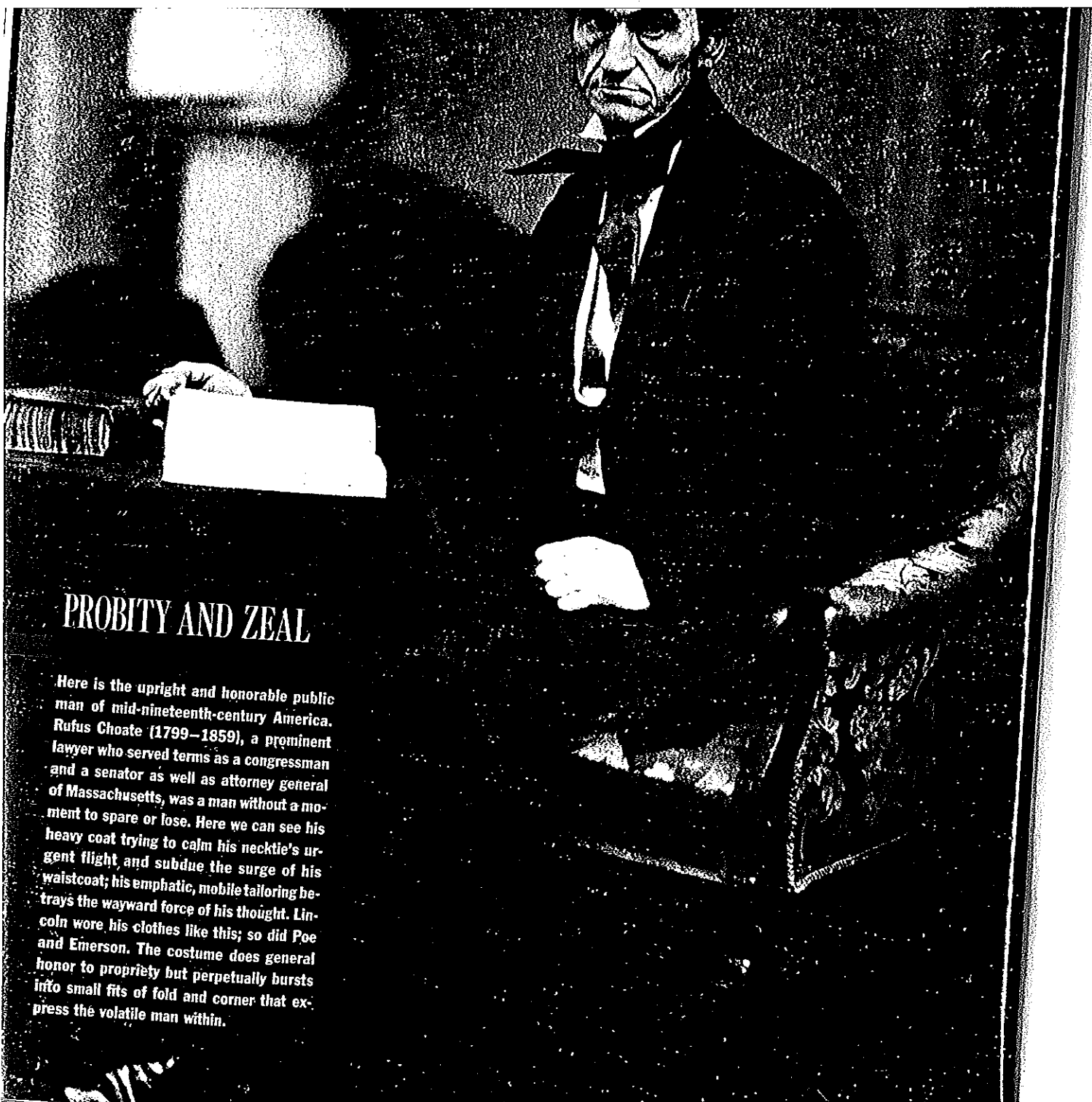


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PROBITY AND ZEAL

Here is the upright and honorable public man of mid-nineteenth-century America. Rufus Choate (1799–1859), a prominent lawyer who served terms as a congressman and a senator as well as attorney general of Massachusetts, was a man without a moment to spare or lose. Here we can see his heavy coat trying to calm his necktie's urgent flight and subdue the surge of his waistcoat; his emphatic, mobile tailoring betrays the wayward force of his thought. Lincoln wore his clothes like this; so did Poe and Emerson. The costume does general honor to propriety but perpetually bursts into small fits of fold and corner that express the volatile man within.

MAKING THE MAN

by Anne Hollander

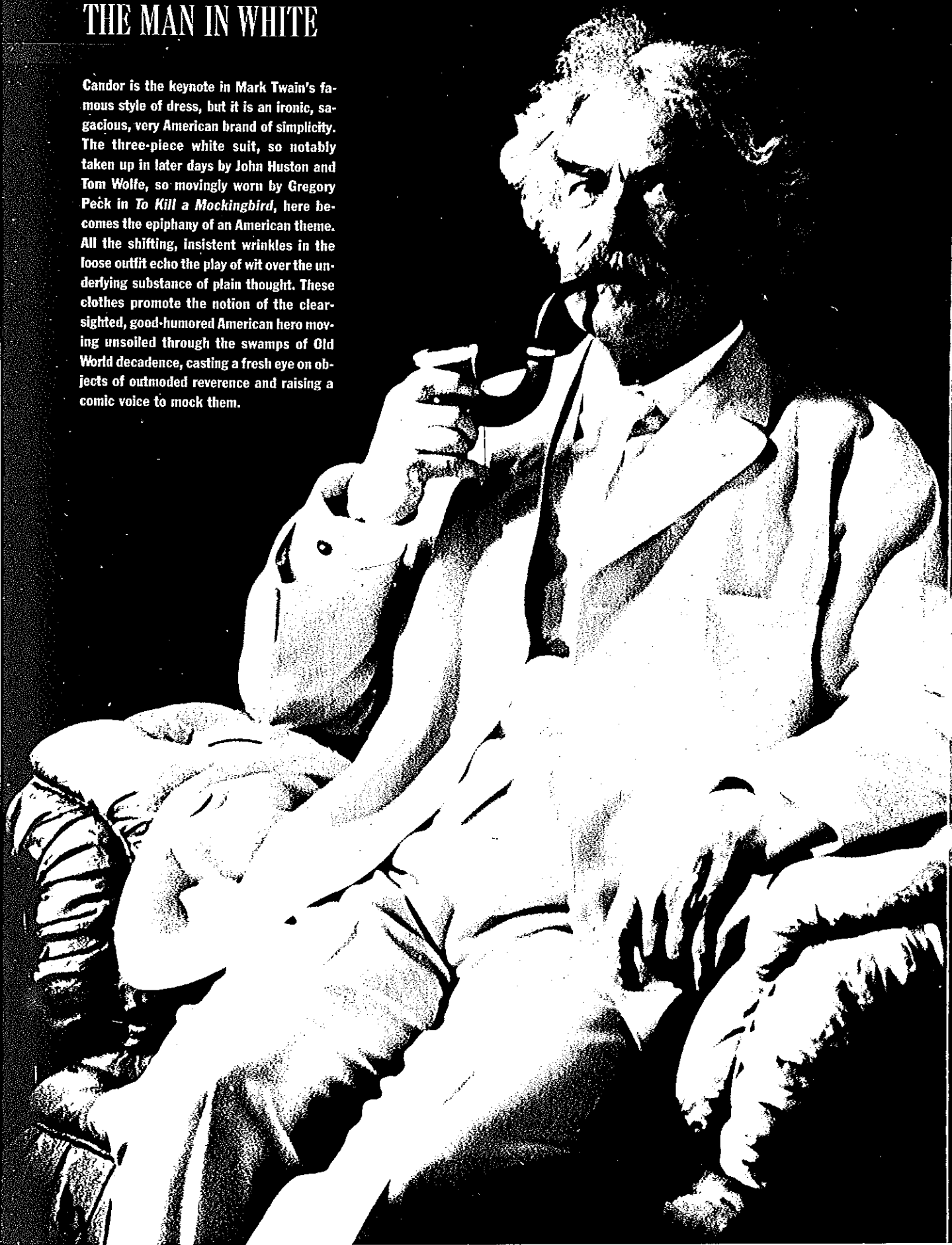
An expert on fashion history looks at portraits of some eminent Americans to see what they say about the native style.

Until recent years the United States wasn't known as a capital of fashion for men. If anything, our historical male image has been rough and artless compared with suave British counterparts and elegant Continental models. Nevertheless, we have had true masculine fashion figures, men whose dress has harmonized so well with their free American souls that the whole world has been moved by the combination. American sartorial heroes have leaped past fashion, sidestepping the understated masculine icon invented in England by Beau Brummell early in the nineteenth century. In this country a different standard arose for male looks, based on an ideal of strong individual personality devoid of eccentricity, free but sane. It allowed a way to dress that might incorporate—but was never a slave to—the restrained look of success in an ordered middle-class society. Instead, an American man's clothes could reveal some unique style or personal goal and be a mirror of those cherished ambitions America hopes to foster in each citizen. Here men's clothes at their greatest moments have had the sense of liberty without lawlessness that all the best American style embodies.

Anne Hollander, an art historian, is the author of *Seeing through Clothes* (Viking Penguin). Her new book, *Moving Pictures*, will be published by Knopf in the spring.

THE MAN IN WHITE

Candor is the keynote in Mark Twain's famous style of dress, but it is an ironic, sagacious, very American brand of simplicity. The three-piece white suit, so notably taken up in later days by John Huston and Tom Wolfe, so movingly worn by Gregory Peck in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, here becomes the epiphany of an American theme. All the shifting, insistent wrinkles in the loose outfit echo the play of wit over the underlying substance of plain thought. These clothes promote the notion of the clear-sighted, good-humored American hero moving unsoiled through the swamps of Old World decadence, casting a fresh eye on objects of outmoded reverence and raising a comic voice to mock them.





THE WILD WEST

Buffalo Bill is the source for all our ideas of what to wear in our own wilderness. His clothes show how to encompass what the Indians and the Mexicans knew and to exercise our Yankee style in harmony with theirs. The leather fringes blend with the quasi-military boots and big belt, the firearms with the silver embroidery; the cowboy hat crowns the assemblage. Chaps or a bandanna might be added, or the boots modified; but in all its versions, the American Western image was stamped on the national consciousness by William Cody, seen at left in 1909 with two colleagues from his Wild West show.

THE ENTREPRENEUR

Dressed like an American Diaghilev or Prince of Wales, the artist Frederic Remington (1861–1909) here wears the clothing of manipulative power, a sleek style quite correctly remote from the actual product he marketed. Remington helped create the romance of the West, elevating Cody's cowboy-and-Indian melodrama into enduring art. He showed how the Western myth could be regenerated by Eastern talent, but instead of dressing the part, he let his pictures and sculpture carry the message. Here he sports the rich trappings of late-Victorian success: single-breasted jacket and striped trousers, walking stick and bowler, finished off with a cigarette.





THE DEEP BLUE

This crisp and disciplined model of turn-of-the-century elegance is Adm. George Dewey, the hero of Manila Bay. Yachting clothes in all their later adaptations—the universally becoming blue blazer and pale trousers in all their variants—suggest the freedom of the seas rightly subject to poised and purposeful masculine control. Even a rather massive figure is flattered by the clean, cool style.

THE COMPLEAT HERO

This image of John F. Kennedy in 1962 connects and combines many themes. First is the American individual personality, dressed to suit its inmost self, but here flavored with suggestions of traditional ocean-going strength of will. Along with this go a lack of self-consciousness or need for display and an easy familiarity with simple materials that everyone knows and uses—plain wool and cotton, like sea and sand. The huge commercial empire of Ralph Lauren is essentially based on this sartorial distillation of high American class. It embodies an ideal devoid of rigid British hierarchies or restraints. Instead, it promotes the sense of a self-made aristocracy free to rise and succeed, to attain through desire—to *fashion* itself.

