

KBJ'S COLLAR

On January 20, 2025, as Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson took her place at the presidential inauguration, her presence was more emblematic. Draped over the iconic SCOTUS black robe was a striking collar of cowrie shells — a token of resistance, heritage and the power of femininity. More than a mere accessory, the collar was a message — one that wove together history, culture and the fight for the future of

Cowrie shells, once used as currency across Africa, symbolize prosperity and protection. However, their history is also intertwined with the transatlantic slave trade, where they were exchanged for enslaved Africans, making them a stark symbol of both exploitation and survival. In America, they hold deeper resonance, linked to the resistance against enslavement, as noted by the National Museum of African American History and Culture. For Jackson, a descendant of enslaved people, this

choice carried profound weight. The fact that the Inauguration coincided with Martin Luther King Jr. Day made the symbolism even more poignant. But beyond history, the cowrie shell also represents femininity and fertility, a statement in stark contrast to the judicial landscape of recent years — one shaped by the erosion of women's rights and the Supreme Court's role in overturning *Roe v. Wade*.

Jackson chose to commission the collar from artisans of her ancestral homeland, which reflects an

ever-growing movement in American fashion: a movement that acknowledges and amplifies global craftsmanship. Jackson's choice to wear cowrie shells at the swearing-in of a president with a well-documented history of misogyny and anti-Black rhetoric sent its own quiet, yet undeniable, message.



Her collar follows in the legacy of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who used fashion — specifically, her judicial collars — to communicate her stance on the bench. Ginsburg's beaded jabot signified majority rulings; her metallic necklace, dissent. RBG was known for weaving dissent and advocacy into her outfits. Whether that be a rainbow collar in honor the Majority decision to legalize same-sex marriage, or a beaded collar of the transgender flag to show alliance with transgender youth.

This interplay between politics, fashion and identity is nothing new. Throughout history, clothing has been a battleground for cultural expression, defiance and belonging. From the Civil Rights Movement's adoption of African textiles to the rise of contemporary designers celebrating diasporic heritage, fashion has always mirrored larger societal shifts. Jackson's collar belongs to this continuum — it is a reflection of how personal and political identities intertwine in the public sphere. In physically displaying commitment to anti-commitment, politicians showcase their beliefs and passions that work to highlight the needs and goals of the people.



Historical examples of fashion as dissent are abundant. The Black Panther Party's signature black berets and leather jackets in the 1960s and 1970s symbolizes strength, unity, and resistance against systemic oppression. The suffragettes of the early 1900s wore white dresses as a visual declaration of their fight for women's voting rights, a tradition echoed by female politicians today. In more recent times, the pink pussyhats took the stage. At the 2017 Women's March these taboo hats became a global symbol of solidarity and women's empowerment, inspiring similar protests and feminist movements in countries such as France, Argentina, and India, where

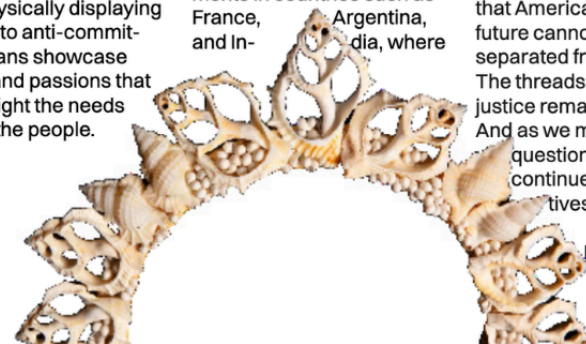
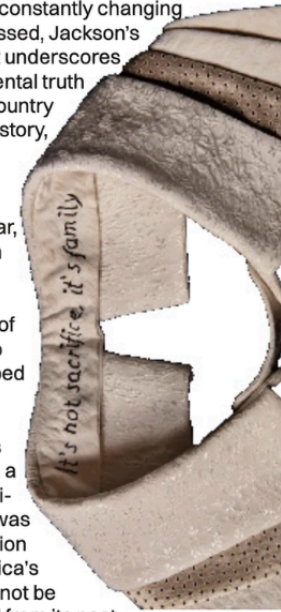
where women adopted their own versions of statement-making attire to fight for gender equality.

Like Justice Jackson's collar, these moments remind us that what we wear can be a powerful statement — a way to challenge injustice, reclaim heritage or spark conversation. Fashion becomes a

In an era where American identity is constantly changing and discussed, Jackson's statement underscores a fundamental truth that this country is not one story, but many. American culture is not singular, but woven together from the traditions of those who have shaped it. Justice Jackson's collar was more than a nod to heritage — it was a declaration that America's future cannot be separated from its past.

The threads of history, identity and justice remain tightly interwoven. And as we move forward, the question remains: How will we continue to stitch these narratives together?

By: Sophie Clancy



HED: KBJ's Collar

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Like Justice Jackson's collar, these moments remind us that what we wear can be a powerful statement — a way to challenge injustice, reclaim heritage or spark conversation. Fashion becomes a language of its own, speaking for those who refuse to be silenced.

In an era where American identity is constantly changing and discussed, Jackson's statement underscores a fundamental truth that this country is not one story, but many. American culture is not singular, but woven together from the traditions of those who have shaped it. Justice Jackson's collar was more than a nod to heritage — it was a declaration that America's future cannot be separated from its past. The threads of history, identity and justice remain tightly interwoven. And as we move forward, the question remains: How will we continue to stitch these narratives together?