Matchcoats: Cultural conservatism and change in one aspect of native American clothing.

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https://doi.org/10.1215/00141801-52-4-727
The English term *matchcoat* derives from an Algonquian root word relating to clothing or dress in general. During the seventeenth century *matchcoat* came to refer to European-made units of woolen cloth, generally about two meters (a “fathom”) long, that were traded to natives who wore them as loosely wrapped cloaks. Some English-speaking scholars have erroneously emphasized the word *match*, inferring that “matchcoats” were garments that were pieced together from small units, or matched in a way that resembled techniques used by natives to make cloaks from pelts. The common “blanket” worn by the stereotypical “Indian” of that period also was called a matchcoat. Native-made garments, often described in the early literature, were rapidly replaced by these pieces of trade cloth. The term *matchcoat* was being applied to “made up” or off-the-rack tailored sleeved coats by the 1680s. The use of increasingly elaborate trade-cloth coats reveals progressive adoption of European garments among all of the native peoples of the Northeast.

American Society for Ethnohistory
2005

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