



Ann Lowe: Elite Dressmaker By Beth Frede



Image from <https://americanhistory.si.edu/blog/lowe>

On September 12, 1953, the fairy-tale-like wedding of MASSACHUSETTS Senator John F. Kennedy to SOCIALITE and photographer Jacqueline Bouvier captivated America. According to one observer the entire affair resembled a royal CORONATION, but it was the bride's gown that all eyes were glued to. It set the stage for Jackie Kennedy's future REPUTATION as a fashion icon and has inspired bridal fashion to this day. With so much HYPE about the dress, you might be surprised to learn that the designer who crafted it was scarcely recognized for her monumental contribution to the wedding, and indeed to fashion history. Today, we'll talk about ANN LOWE, accomplished yet under-credited COUTURIER (person who designs, makes, and sells fashionable clothes for women).



<https://www.shoutsfromathirdact.com/2017/03/a-hidden-figure-in-the-fashion-world/>

SPELL: SCARCELY DESIGNER ROYAL

Today's lesson is about whom? ANN LOWE

A person who designs, makes, and sells fashionable clothes for women is a? COUTURIER

The fairy-tale-like ___ of John F. Kennedy to Jacqueline Bouvier captivated America. WEDDING

One observer said the wedding resembled a royal___. CORONATION

Jacqueline Bouvier's wedding dress has ___ bridal fashion. INSPIRED

The designer of the bridal gown was scarcely recognized for her monumental ___ to the wedding or to fashion history. CONTRIBUTION

All eyes were glued to what? THE BRIDE'S GOWN; JACQUELINE BOUVIER'S GOWN; WEDDING DRESS

Name one of the things Jacqueline Bouvier was known for. SOCIALITE, PHOTOGRAPHER, FASHION ICON

What's a synonym for monumental? TITANIC, TREMENDOUS, HUGE, GREAT, ENORMOUS, MASSIVE, IMMENSE, etc.

What is a fashion trend that gets a lot of hype today?

Ann Cole Lowe was born in 1898 in rural Alabama, which was deeply steeped in racial SEGREGATION. Slavery had officially ended three decades prior, but reminders of it were alive and well; in fact, Lowe was the great GRANDDAUGHTER of an enslaved woman and an Alabama plantation owner. But despite being a Black person living in the JIM CROW

south, Lowe was exposed to success and ENTREPRENEURSHIP through her mother JANEY and grandmother Georgia. They co-owned a dressmaking business catering to Alabama's white society ladies, including Montgomery's first families (families of the highest social rank in a given place, such as the US president's family, or a governor or mayor's family).

SPELL: RURAL MONTGOMERY STEEPED

Ann Lowe was born in rural _____. ALABAMA

By the time Ann was born, slavery had officially ended three what prior?
DECADES

Lowe was the great ____ of an enslaved woman and an Alabama plantation owner. GRANDDAUGHTER

Lowe was exposed to success and ____ through her mother and grandmother. ENTREPRENEURSHIP

What year was Lowe born in? 1898

How old would Lowe be if she was alive today? $2024 - 1898 = 126$ YEARS OLD

Ann's mother and grandmother co-owned a _____. SUCCESSFUL DRESSMAKING BUSINESS

What was the name of Ann's mother or grandmother? JANEY, GEORGIA
A "first family" is the family of a _____. PRESIDENT, MAYOR, GOVERNOR

Name a state that borders Alabama. MISSISSIPPI, GEORGIA, FLORIDA, TENNESSEE

What comes to mind when you hear the word segregation?

Lowe showed a natural APTITUDE (ability) for sewing from a young age. As a six-year-old, Ann taught herself how to create beautiful fabric flowers, and these would later become a SIGNATURE feature of her unique and sought-after designs. At age 14, Ann quit school to join Janey and Georgia and pursue her interest in fashion and design full time. Perhaps it was FORTUNATE that she did because two years later her mother died unexpectedly, leaving Ann to take over the business. Not only that, but at the time of her passing, Janey had been in the middle of completing an order for Alabama's First Lady ELIZABETH KIRKMAN O'NEAL. Ann somehow finished O'Neal's four COMMISSIONED (made to order) gowns while SIMULTANEOUSLY (at the same time) mourning the loss of her mother.



Detail of Handmade Flowers

From <https://thevintagewomanmagazine.com/haute-history-ann-cole-lowe/>

SPELL: NATURAL BEAUTIFUL UNIQUE

Lowé showed a natural _____ for sewing. **APTITUDE**

Another word for aptitude is? **ABILITY**

When Ann took over the business, who was Alabama's First Lady?

ELIZABETH KIRKMAN O'NEAL

The word used for made to order is? **COMMISSIONED**

The word from the lesson meaning at the same time? **SIMULTANEOUSLY**

How old was Ann when she taught herself how to create fabric flowers? **6 YEARS OLD**

How old was Ann when she quit school? **14**

When Ann's mother died, Ann had to take over what? **THE FAMILY BUSINESS, THE DRESSMAKING BUSINESS, etc.**

What's something you have an aptitude for?

What is something you have taught yourself?

Around the same time, Ann married Lee COHEN. Cohen expected his wife to be a homemaker, but the UNCONVENTIONAL (nontraditional or unorthodox) Lowé had other plans. After giving birth to their son ARTHUR LEE and devoting herself exclusively to motherhood for almost a year, Lowé felt the world of fashion BECKONING (calling to) her again. JOSEPHINE LEE, the wife of a wealthy Florida TYCOON (powerful

businessperson), sought Lowe to become her personal dressmaker. “It was a chance to make all the lovely gowns I’d always dreamed of,” she said years later in a *Saturday Evening Post* article. Leaving Cohen behind, Lowe and her son hopped on a train for Tampa, and within a couple of years she had established herself as a respected designer there.

SPELL: DEVOTING ESTABLISHED RESPECTED

Ann married who? LEE COHEN

Cohen expected his wife to be a _____. HOMEMAKER

Ann’s son was named? ARTHUR LEE

The meaning of “calling to” is? BECKONING

Josephine Lee was the wife of a wealthy Florida _____. TYCOON

What city did Lowe and her son move to? TAMPA

Another word for unconventional is? UNORTHODOX; NONTRADITIONAL, UNUSUAL, UNCOMMON

Why did Lowe enjoy working for Josephine Lee? CHANCE TO MAKE LOVELY GOWNS, DREAM JOB

Name a famous business tycoon. STEVE JOBS, OPRAH WINFREY, JEFF BEZOS, etc.

What is the capital of Florida? TALLAHASSEE

VAKT: Watch Ann Lowe being interviewed on the Mike Douglas Show here - <https://youtu.be/wgZHWvmEqX8> (21 min. Watch until 3:15)



At age 19, Lowe’s Tampa **BENEFACTOR** (patron or sponsor) encouraged her to attend design school in New York City, where she dreamed of one day becoming one of the greatest designers of her generation. Lowe was accepted at the S.T. TAYLOR DESIGN SCHOOL, but when the director of the school realized he had admitted a Black student, he tried to **DISSUADE** (deter or discourage) her from attending. It was decided that she could stay so long as she took her classes separately from the other students. Lowe actually thrived in this environment. Also, her work was so **EXCEPTIONAL** that it was

often used to show her classmates how to correctly execute various sewing techniques. Lowe graduated early and moved back to Tampa, where her career continued to FLOURISH.



Interior of an Ann Lowe dress. <https://thevintagewomanmagazine.com/haute-history-ann-cole-lowe/>

SPELL: REALIZED FLOURISH DETER

Lowe dreamed of becoming one of the greatest designers of her ____.

GENERATION

The ____ of the S.T. Taylor Design School tried to discourage Lowe from attending. **DIRECTOR**

Another word for deter or discourage is? **DISSUADE**

Lowe had to take her classes ____ from the other students. **SEPARATELY**

Lowe's work was so ____ that it was often used to show her classmates how to correctly execute various sewing techniques. **EXCEPTIONAL**

At age ____, Lowe attended design school. 19

The word benefactor means what? **PATRON, SPONSOR**

Where did Lowe attend school? **IN NEW YORK CITY; NYC; THE S.T.**

TAYLOR DESIGN SCHOOL

What is a synonym for exceptional? **UNCOMMON, EXTRAORDINARY, ATYPICAL, UNUSUAL**

What is New York City's nickname? **THE BIG APPLE**

What's the capital of New York (state)? **ALBANY**

What does the word flourish mean to you?

VAKT: Point to tools of the trade used by a clothing designer.



Left to Right: Image from www.Woodandshop.com; Image from SurLa Table;

In 1928 after ten years of dressing Tampa's social ELITE (a select, often privileged group), Lowe returned to New York permanently with her son. She began sewing for high-end stores including CHEZ SONIA, NEIMAN MARCUS, and SAKS FIFTH AVENUE. Lowe was doing what she loved, and clients sought her repeatedly, but she was still referred to as "Society's best-kept secret." If you wonder how that could be, here's one example: her dresses were featured in VOGUE magazine, yet she wasn't credited with having designed them. Part of the issue was that clothing labels at that time included the name of the store from which an item came, but not the name of the designer who made it. Part of the issue was that Black designers who CATERED to a high-end White CLIENTELE were rare. And part of the issue was that her clients wanted to keep Lowe a secret so that she would not be as sought-after and start charging more for her IMPECCABLE work.



<https://www.harlemworldmagazine.com/harlems-ann-lowe-fashion-designer-first-ladies/>



Olivia de Havilland wore a dress by Ann Cole Lowe when she accepted the Academy Award for Best Actress from presenter Ray Milland at the awards ceremony in 1946. Photo: from the Academy Awards show photographs of the [Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences](#).

SPELL: SOUGHT CREDITED CATERED

Another word for a select, often privileged group is? **ELITE**

Lowe's clients sought her repeatedly, but she was still referred to as Society's what? **BEST KEPT SECRET**

Lowe's dresses were featured in what magazine? **VOGUE**

In the 1920s, clothing ___ included the name of the store, but not the name of the designer. **LABELS**

Black designers who catered to a high-end White ___ were rare.

CLIENTELE

Lowe's work was ____. **IMPECCABLE**

Name one of the high-end stores from the text that Lowe sewed for. **CHEZ SONIA, NEIMAN MARCUS, SAKS FIFTH AVENUE**

A word that means the opposite of permanent? TEMPORARY, MOMENTARY, FLEETING, EPHEMERAL

What do you think about Lowe's work being kept a "secret"?

Finally in 1950 after weathering numerous financial struggles including the Great Depression, Lowe's goal to open her own ATELIER (design studio) in New York came to FRUITION (realization or completion). "Ann Lowe's Gowns" on Madison Avenue in Manhattan was the first female Black-owned design shop to open in one of NYC's most prominent shopping areas. Arthur was his mother's business partner, and helped curb her tendency to CAPITULATE (yield, give in) to wealthy clients who wanted to pay pennies on the dollar for her work, which rivaled the finest couture in Paris. Unfortunately, despite Arthur's business ACUMEN (shrewdness or astuteness), Lowe continued to struggle financially.

SPELL: TENDENCY SHREWDNESS PARTNER

Another word for design studio is? ATELIER

"Ann Lowe's Gowns" was located on which street in Manhattan? MADISON AVENUE

Arthur was his mother's ___ partner. BUSINESS

Lowe's work rivaled the finest couture in ____. PARIS

Business shrewdness or astuteness is known as ____. ACUMEN

In what year did Lowe open her own design shop in NY? 1950

How many years after moving to NY did Lowe open her design shop?

1950-1928=22 YEARS

How many years ago did Lowe open her own design shop?

2024-1950 = 74 YEARS AGO

Fruition means what? REALIZATION, COMPLETION, EVENTUALLY OPENING THE STORE

Capitulate means to what? YIELD, GIVE IN, SURRENDER, CONCEDE

What triggered the Great Depression in the US in 1929? STOCK MARKET CRASH

Name a famous landmark in New York City. STATUE OF LIBERTY, EMPIRE STATE BUILDING, BROADWAY, CENTRAL PARK, etc.

What's one goal you'd like to complete?

Three years later, Lowe was asked to create the wedding gown and bridesmaids' dresses for the famed Kennedy wedding. After two months of INTENSIVE work, Lowe's studio flooded, ruining ten of the 15 gowns including the bride's. Lowe and her small staff of SEAMSTRESSES worked around the clock, RECREATING what had been lost in just one week. With only hours spare, Lowe hand-delivered the gowns to the bride's parents' home. But upon arrival, SECURITY staff directed her to enter through the service entrance. She refused, insisting on entering through the front door



and threatening to take the gowns back if she was stopped. She eventually PREVAILED (triumphed), and MIRACULOUSLY the gowns all fit. Ultimately though, in what should have been a BOON (benefit or stroke of luck) for her career, Lowe was snubbed by the bride, went unacknowledged in nearly all PICTORIALS (articles in publications that feature mostly pictures) of the well-publicized wedding, and incurred a loss of over \$2000.

<https://www.harlemworldmagazine.com/harlems-ann-lowe-fashion-designer-first-ladies/>

SPELL: INSISTING ENTRANCE SECURITY

Ten of the 15 dresses were ruined when Lowe's studio _____. FLOODED

It had originally taken two months of ____ work to make the Kennedy wedding party's dresses. INTENSIVE

Lowe had a staff of _____ working around the clock. SEAMSTRESSES

When Lowe delivered the dresses, where did security staff direct her?

SERVICE ENTRANCE

Another word meaning triumphed is? PREVAILED

If Lowe had charged \$400 for each of the 14 bridesmaid dresses and \$500

for the bride's gown, how much would she have made had there been no flood?

$400 \times 14 = 5600$

$5600 + 500 = 6100$ DOLLARS

Lowe was asked to create the what for the Kennedy wedding? WEDDING GOWN, BRIDESMAID DRESSES

Instead of making the dresses being a boon for Ann's career, what happened? LOWE LOST OVER \$2000; LOWE WAS SNUBBED BY THE BRIDE; LOWE WAS UNACKNOWLEDGED FOR HER WORK ON THE DRESSES

What is an antonym for prevailed? LOST, FAILED, DEFEATED

What comes to mind when you hear the word "miraculous"?

In the late 1950s through 1960s, Lowe endured a series of major challenges. She lost her son to a car accident, lost her design studio due to financial mismanagement, and lost sight in one eye due to GLAUCOMA. But still, she continued to design. "I've had to work by feel," she said in a 1964 *SATURDAY EVENING POST* interview. "But people tell me I've done better feeling than others do seeing."

SPELL: MISMANAGEMENT FEELING CHALLENGES

Lowe lost her sight in one eye due to what? GLAUCOMA

In which publication was Lowe quoted as saying, "...people tell me I've done better feeling than others do seeing"? SATURDAY EVENING POST

Name one of Lowe's losses. SON, DESIGN STUDIO, SIGHT IN ONE EYE

Do you have a sensory system or systems that you rely on more heavily than others? If so, which?

Lowe retired in 1972 and died nine years later. In her lifetime, she remained relatively UNKNOWN. However, in the last few years she gained some long overdue RECOGNITION. In 2018, The National Museum of African American History & Culture created a special exhibit on Lowe. And a CADRE (small group or team) of University of Delaware fashion students have crafted a replica of Lowe's Jacqueline Bouvier wedding dress for a September 2023 exhibition titled "Ann Lowe: American Couturier." Though Lowe's life was not always easy, she found joy and purpose in her work. "All the pleasure I have had," said Lowe, "I owe to my sewing."

SPELL: EXHIBITION CADRE PLEASURE

In her lifetime Ann Lowe remained relatively ____.

In the last few years of her life Lowe gained some long overdue ____.

RECOGNITION

In 2018, The National Museum of African American ____ and ____ created a special exhibit on Lowe.

Lowe said, "All the pleasure I have had I owe to my ____."

What year did Lowe retire? 1972

What year did Lowe die? $1972 + 9 = 1981$

A group of students from where have been making a replica of Jacqueline Bouvier's wedding dress? UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE, DELAWARE

An exhibition titled "Ann Lowe: American Couturier" was shown when?

SEPTEMBER; SEPTEMBER OF 2023

Lowe found what in her work. PURPOSE, JOY

VAKT: Below is a gown Ann Lowe designed for Pauline Carver Duxbury for her 1967 debutante ball. Touch each of the flowers on the bodice (the close-fitting upper part of a dress). How many are there?



<https://americanhistory.si.edu/blog/lowe>

The full gown front and detail of the back:



Images from
<https://americanhistory.si.edu/blog/lowe>

Creative Writing:

How would you describe Ann Lowe's work ethic?

Why do you think finances were such a challenge for Lowe? What was the relationship between money and Lowe's values? Would you have approached money differently if you were Lowe? Why or why not?

Why do you think Lowe wanted to enter through the front door to deliver the dresses instead of through the service entrance?

How do you think Lowe felt when she saw the gowns after they were ruined? How do you think she felt after she and her team were able to recreate the gowns in record time?

What's your advice for how to get through a challenging event?

Beth Frede is an S2C Practitioner based in New Hampshire where she lives with her husband and dog. She loves painting, puttering in the kitchen, and learning about new things while writing lessons.

Resources:

- <https://www.pressreader.com/>
- <https://youtu.be/wgZHWvmEqX8>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ann_Lowe
- <https://americanhistory.si.edu/blog/lowe>
- <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/aesthetic>
- <https://thevintagewomanmagazine.com/haute-history-ann-cole-lowe/>
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- <https://www.threadsmagazine.com/2021/02/09/profiles-in-sewing-part-1-ann-cole-lowe>
- https://www.huffpost.com/entry/ann-lowe-black-fashion-designer-jacqueline-kennedy-wedding-dress_n_2624316?slideshow=true#gallery/278925/5
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- <https://americanhistory.si.edu/blog/lowe>