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Popeyes Uniforms Are a Surprise Fashion Hit (Thanks, Beyoncé)

The fast-food chain started selling its uniforms after the pop star launched her similar-looking collection. Only one suggests accessorizing with a chicken sandwich.

By Mike Jordan

Feb. 4, 2020 11:09 am ET

The New York fashion shows gearing up to start this week won't be featuring one of the season's most buzzed about offerings: a collection of actual fast-food uniforms.

Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen last week began selling clothing from an online shop called That Look From Popeyes. Most of the items sold out within a day. Popeyes says it is restocking.

Who are the people who don't work at Popeyes but want to look like they do?

Jeremiah Morse, for one. The New York City resident, who calls himself a "fashion chameleon," paid \$25 for a Popeyes executive button-down. He refers to the wrinkle-resistant garment—a 65/35 blend of polyester and cotton with an embroidered Popeyes logo on the left breast—as "the red manager's shirt." He tentatively announced his purchase on Twitter: "I may or may not have bought Popeyes merch."

Other fast-food chains have dabbled in apparel. Italian fashion house Moschino offered a \$780 sweater with a McDonald's -inspired logo, while unisex clothing line Telfar collaborated with White Castle.



Fast-food chic

Fans of Burger King or KFC can buy polo shirts or jackets with brand logos on them. And Taco Bell's Taco Shop website offers six different bathing suits, including what it calls a sauce packet bikini for \$60.

"KFC had a line. Cheetos teamed up with Forever 21. Why? Because it's an effective brand extension," says Duke Greenhill,

Savannah College of Art and Design's chairman of advertising and graphic design.

"The food brands don't expect their threads to make Anna Wintour turn her head," he says. "Built into the extension is a tongue-in-cheek nod—a wink to target audiences that they're on the inside of a benign and partial joke."

How Popeyes maroon-and-orange polos, jackets and crew-neck sweatshirts—worn to make and sell food at the fried-chicken chain—suddenly became in vogue is a tale of life imitating fashion imitating life.

Pop star Beyoncé's Ivy Park clothing line recently launched an activewear collection with Adidas. The social-media world immediately lighted up over the line's striking similarities to Popeyes uniforms. (An Ivy Park representative didn't respond to requests for comment.)

Miami-based advertising agency GUT, which began working with Popeyes during last year's craze over its new chicken sandwich, caught wind of it. Juan Javier Peña Plaza, the agency's executive creative director, says his team saw side-by-side visuals of Beyoncé's line and Popeyes uniforms and food packaging popping up on

Instagram and Twitter. They flagged it during a meeting with Popeyes on Jan. 22.

“When

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Beyoncé’s collection came out, we saw lots of people organically say it kind of looked like Popeyes,” said Popeyes Chief Marketing Officer Fernando Machado. So the chain decided to start selling the clothing itself, with proceeds going to its charitable foundation.

GUT held a casting call for Popeyes employees in South Florida to appear as models. On Jan. 27, photos were shot that echoed images in the Ivy Park ads. Two days later, the site and online shop went live.



Italian fashion house Moschino offered a \$780 sweater with a McDonald's-inspired logo. PHOTO: JACOPO RAULE/GETTY IMAGES

Ebony Jones, a 39-year-old from Los Angeles, paid \$30.50 for the white, long-sleeve Popeyes uniform tunic. She says she and her mother, a Beyoncé fan, chuckled on the phone about the similarities between Beyoncé’s and Popeyes’s white shirts, noting they both had long tails.

“I’m not usually a trend-forward person,” Ms. Jones says. “But I do have a lot of company merch from previous employers and golf tournaments I’ve been in.” She plans to turn the tunic into “more of a dress” and wear it for the first time at the Essence Festival, a New Orleans music event that Beyoncé has headlined.

Antonia Taylor, a 21-year-old from El Paso, Texas, purchased the maroon Popeyes crew-neck sweatshirt for \$23. She says she doesn't really follow fashion, but loved the collection's colors. "I just choose what is cheap and accessible to me, and what fits my body type and personality," she says.

She expects to wear the sweatshirt to school and work.

Matt Rivera, 31, of Los Angeles, liked the execution of the Popeyes collection and bought two items. He describes his purchase as a lighthearted way to be "in on the joke." Considering it an amusing jab at Beyoncé's fan base, he says the absurdity of the Popeyes line makes it more interesting to him than Ivy Park.

GUT's Mr. Peña Plaza says his team simply showcased existing uniforms in a way people consider fashionable.

"That's the only thing we did," he says, "grab something from the day-to-day, and say, 'Hey world, this can also be fashion.' We put it in that light, and people said, 'Yes.' If you show it as fashion, it's fashion."

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