

It was a truism of ancient Roman culture that “you are what you wear.” The Romans saw outward appearances as a (largely) reliable guide to inward character and furthermore, they developed a system of exclusive sartorial privileges which served to signify juridical rank plainly to all viewers. More than merely reflections or expressions of identity, however, I argue that items of adornment were participants in the process of shaping it. Following the lead of symbolic interactionists in Sociology (Stone 1962, Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1995), I begin with the premise that personal identity is constructed by social interaction, in which appearances, including adornment, play a part. In the course of my paper I argue that Augustus recognized the power of adornment to create identity and he therefore concerned himself with regulating sartorial privilege as a means of influencing attitudes and behaviors.

One of Augustus’s measures considered the wearing of the *latus clavus*, the vertical purple stripes that adorned the tunics worn by senators under their togas. One of the most important sources is a remark of Suetonius, *Liberis senatorum, quo celerius rei p. assuescerent, protinus a virili toga latum clavum induere et curiae interesse permisit* (Div. Aug. 38.2). Unfortunately, Suetonius is not more explicit in describing the degree to which this encouragement to senatorial sons to wear the *latus clavus* was accompanied by explicit bans on its use by all other non-senators. This lack of clarity in the sources combined with apparent changes of practice in the course of time has led to confusion and debate among modern scholars. Levick provides a helpful summary of the pertinent ancient sources and prevailing interpretations (1991). My task is not to debate the details of the measure, which without new source material cannot be known beyond doubt, but instead to consider the measure as part of a larger pattern of social control through management of sartorial symbols.

Augustus concerned himself with the senate because the continued stability and authority of that body was critical to his justification and maintenance of his own power. Various cast as consular, proconsular or tribunitian, Augustus’s powers seemingly derived from rewards offered by the senate. Preserving and enhancing the authority of the senate aided his own position as well as placating those who would be in the best position to undermine the political stability that finally emerged after decades of war and unrest. Preserving the *de facto* hereditary nature of the senate and filling its ranks with members of old senatorial families would serve to demonstrate the continuity of tradition and provide proof of the restoration of the Republic. Because of the connection between adornment and identity, the granting of the *latus clavus* to senatorial sons prior to a senatorial magistracy was more than a matter of approval or encouragement to enter that body, but part of a process of indoctrination, and assimilation of identity. Assuming the *latus clavus* established the young man as a senator-in-training, to others and to himself. Augustus’s *latus clavus* policy did not just encourage sons of senators to join the senate, it attempted to press an identity on them – making them senators by making them senatorial.