

## Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Dr. Hannah Carlson

JVN // Welcome to Getting Curious, I'm Jonathan Van Ness, where every week I sit down for a gorgeous conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. So you know that feeling when you try on a dress, and you love it, and then you realize: it has pockets?! Those pockets have more than 500 years of history in them. And honey, I just never thought about that. And today we're turning that history inside out. Welcome to the show Hannah Carlson, who is an award-winning clothing historian, researcher, and author. She's a senior lecturer in the apparel design department at the Rhode Island School of Design, and the author of the new book *Pockets: An Intimate History of How We Keep Things Close*. Hannah, how are you?

HANNAH CARLSON // I'm great. Thanks for having me. And that expression, "It's got pockets!" is something that, you know, motivated me to write this book.

JVN // So it is officially, like, 108 in Texas. If you're a centigrade person, I don't even know how hot that is. But suffice to say, it's very hot. I'm in that time of year where I'm wearing just Kim Kardashian Skims. So, I'm, I'm pocketless today. I feel devastated. I really wanted to rock a pocket, but alas—

HANNAH CARLSON // Love it.

JVN // So, where are you, Hannah?

HANNAH CARLSON // I'm in Rhode Island, where it's hot but it's not *that* hot. And I, I can wear—oh, shoot, I'm not wearing pockets in my shirt!

JVN // But it doesn't mean that we aren't experts. You know? It's ok that we're not wearing pockets today. Like, it's, it's not for every day a pocket, but I wish that it was.

HANNAH CARLSON // Right. Yep, you know, that's a huge reason to write this book. I think this idea that, "Why would a functional element of dress, a really simple thing like a pocket? Why should that be gendered? How, how did that happen? And how has that been actually true for the entire 500 years of their existence?"

JVN // I think we understand what pockets are, but how do you define pockets in your work?

HANNAH CARLSON // Ok. I think a pocket is a permanently stitched fold. There are all sorts of temporary pockets. When you look at the sort of world history of dress, you take the Roman toga, for example, it's wrapped and draped around the body and there was this sort of cavity right at the chest called the sinus. And that sinus, people put stuff in. Roman, the late Roman Emperor Augustus insisted that before senators showed up that someone search that cavity for weapons. So that pocket, though, when you undraped the toga, wasn't there anymore. And so I guess I'm trying to define a pocket as something that stays there after you undrape the clothing. And the reason for that is because pockets really are a function of tailored or fitted garments. And it's only when tailoring really develops that you would even think of taking a little piece of cloth and cutting it up and wasting it and stitching it into a side seam. So they're a pretty late innovation of clothing.

JVN // What was our first historical, like, awareness of pockets? Like, when do we first see pockets? Or in your research, when did, when did you first start seeing people talking about these things called pockets?

HANNAH CARLSON // Well, the crazy thing is, is that pockets are around before they're inserted into clothing. So that word "pocket" comes from the word for "small bag." So we get in English a lot of words from the French. So "posh" means bag. The diminutive -"ette" is small. The Anglo Normans transformed "posh" to "poke." So you get "poke-ette," small bag. A small bag might be used in alchemy. It might be used sort of in chemistry. People used it for medicinal reasons. There's this great book from 1530 where someone says, "Ah, you have to get a pocket and stuff it with herbs and put it on the side of the wound to care for it." But more often than not, a small bag is just carried about the person and on the body. How pockets got *into* clothing, when did they become stitched—that's sort of the question. And it's kind of a mystery. No one really knows. Like, they just start to show up. First mention of them is, like, 1540, Henry VIII, King of England. In his wardrobe accounts, you can see mentions of tailors itemizing the clothing they made for him and they mentioned, "Oh, I made this leather pocket, and I'm gonna charge you, you know, however much pence for this particular pocket." And no one says why! So it's, you know, it's this really fun, this fun mystery.

JVN // Ah! OK. So why is it, though, that we are so obsessed with pockets? Like, when I put on a big dress or especially a skirt, and then I realize that there is like a little pocket in there. It just makes me feel so chic. It gives me, like, new posing options. It's, like, a whole thing. Like, why do we love pockets so much? Why are we so obsessed with them? And why are we also obsessed with, like, say, like, what Abe Lincoln had in his pockets the night he was assassinated. Like, why are we into pockets so much?

HANNAH CARLSON // Okay, so I think there are two parts to your question, and I would say the first part is, like, design and equity question. For anyone wearing a dress, no matter their gender, finding a dress with pockets is such a joy. I think so much women's wear is meant to look aesthetic, attractive, pretty. Overwhelmingly, in other words, driven by aesthetics and not by a consideration of the wearer's needs. You can't fit a cell phone in pockets. There's this great, wonderful analysis by—and I'm sharing my screen—Jan Diehm and Amber Thomas. Can you see that? Where, "Someone clever once said women weren't allowed pockets." Anyway, they looked at all these jeans, about 70 pairs on the mass market, and they have this wonderful sort of analysis of what people can fit in your pockets and you really can't, a lot of people can't even fit a phone, even your hand.

JVN // Yeah, I can speak from experience. That is true. As someone who wears, like, all the different jeans. That is true.

HANNAH CARLSON // A well designed garment, I feel like it's satisfying because it suggests that some designer, someone you don't even know, potentially has thought about your needs has, like, *anticipated* your possible needs. They know what your day or what your possible day might be like, right? And so I think so much of womenswear in particular hasn't had women's backs. And so, like, thoughtful design is a simple support. It's a simple thing, but it means that someone cared for how you were gonna move through the day.

JVN // It's giving intimate, it's giving connection, it's giving, being heard and seen. And that is such a gorgeous experience when you are heard and seen. Honey, we love to be heard in scenes. So that absolutely makes sense.

HANNAH CARLSON // And then the other, the other part of this question I think is the objects that we carry. So I think pockets are like this secret bureau that we sort of move around the world in. They're like a microcosm. They're sort of like a diary. Have you ever found, like, a winter coat? And you packed it away? Although you're in Texas, I don't know if you have any winter coats!

JVN // But I've lived in New York. I've lived in New York. I've lived in lots of cold places. But I mean, yeah, like, I'll open up a winter coat because it does randomly get cold in Austin and like, there's like a mask in it and I'm, like, definitely the last time I wore this was, like, 2022 or, like, 2021.

HANNAH CARLSON // So you get this sort of memory, right? Of, "Oh, right. That was what I did that winter. Here are all these random receipts and the mask and this pebble and—

JVN // The cough drop!

HANNAH CARLSON // Like, this business card and at that number, someone wrote on the back of my matchbook, you know, who was that? Why didn't I call them?" So, I think there's a way in which those objects are incidental, but yet they recall a moment really clearly. And then we're curious about other people's pockets. Where, you know, like, the pockets of our lovers of family, recalcitrant teenagers, and the dead. It's almost as though they give us access to a private life that otherwise we don't have access to.

JVN // So, do we know about what was in Abe Lincoln's pockets?

HANNAH CARLSON // Yeah, so Abe Lincoln is one of those people, someone in his family kept all those objects after he was assassinated. They were put in a box. They were given to the Library of Congress. They were hidden from view until 1976 when the Congress said, you know, "Abe Lincoln is too much of a hero. We need to humanize him. We need to show what he had in his pockets." And I don't think the Library of Congress, their idea actually worked because those objects became sort of like relics and people flocked to see them. They're one of the most visited set of artifacts at the Library of Congress. And I think it's because people think, "Oh, they'll get just a *touch*, an idea of what Lincoln was like. What did he think when he went to the theater that day? What did he unconsciously carry with him? What did he need in his pockets?" And so I think that notion that pockets tell us something is, is key.

JVN // Wait, so what was in there?

HANNAH CARLSON // Lots of ordinary things, you know: a linen pocket, a handkerchief, a pocket knife, a button, a watch fob but no watch, a recently worthless \$5 Confederate bill.

JVN // He had a Confederate bill in his pocket?!

HANNAH CARLSON // More interestingly, I think a newspaper clipping with some favorable reviews of his 1864 presidential candidacy. So, you know, that mean press. Whenever there was a nice review, even Lincoln kept nice reviews in his pockets. Actually, I think the most lovely part about this, this set of objects is that, that in the eyeglasses, what's the thing called the, the arm of your eyeglasses? It had fallen off, the screw had fallen off. So he had a little bit of thread, holding together his glasses and the arm, you know, like, a guy—not very, not vain at all, you know?

JVN // Ok, I love that. So what did people do before pockets? Were they just always rocking bags and handbags or just, like, that sinus toga thing, like, it—like, what was life like before pockets?

HANNAH CARLSON // Yeah, everyone had bags! And they've been around for millenia, and, you know, people, the world all over every culture has the most amazing bags. Think of Ötzi. Is that how you pronounce it? Ötzi? Frozen in the Alps from 3000 BC?

JVN // Oh, I thought you meant, like, "Let it go, let it go." I was, like, "Aww," but no, you mean, like, that frozen—yeah, that frozen, yes!

HANNAH CARLSON // I mean the frozen mummy found in the Alps, he had a bag attached to his belt. Just to say, *forever* we've had bags. And there are the most beautiful books and museum exhibitions about bags. There are just so many, they're incredibly meaningful. But I sort of argue that a pocket is a different kind of thing.

JVN // You mentioned earlier when we were talking about, like, the origin of the word pocket, which by the way, I think that word is so much cuter than, like, the sinus word for, like, the Roman togas. Like, I'm glad that someone came up with pocket, eventually. But you mentioned that Henry the VIII and some of, like, his tailors, like, you know, invoicing him for making pockets. But, like, does that say something about the origins of pockets? Like, when we started seeing pockets come up in, like, you know, the 1500s, and I'm sure in, like, other cultures, I'm thinking about, like, Dr. Jue Guo in our episode about Early China. I'm sure there were other cultures that had other means of dress that maybe had a pocket. But we're talking about like...

HANNAH CARLSON // Ok, so it's connected to tailoring and it's sort of a Western thing at first. Not that it's any better or worse than anything. It's just, it's connected to this idea that you could waste cloth. Think about tailoring, think about a dress. What do you do? You have a piece of cloth, but to get it to shape to your body, you have to cut it up and you make a seam and that seam goes, follows the curve of your waist and the hip. And in doing that, you have to remove a lot of that cloth. A lot of clothing traditions don't do that. I mean, eventually all sorts of clothing traditions include pockets, but from the get go, there are no pockets, for example, in a kimono, there are no pockets in a sari, there are no pockets in, you know, shirts from South America. You just don't do it. The idea of cutting cloth is—cloth comes from the loom and you use it sort of in that configuration.

JVN // That also says something about, like, access. But in the origin of pockets, like, it wasn't, like, people who were, like—was everybody rocking pockets at first? Or was it more for, like, an aristocracy? Like, you know, the people who have access to more money have pockets, like, or were people who just had like, you know, normal bakers' clothes, was their pockets in there?

HANNAH CARLSON // So that question, I think, I actually don't quite know. There's not enough information. It's super hard to tell. There's very little clothing from the 16th century still extant. We don't have many sort of clothes to look at. You know, people have looked at clothing housed in tombs, for example. And there's this one. I think from the 1570s, there was this political assassination and a father and two sons were killed. The mother put all the clothes in this sort of tomb that she buried. Archaeologists, in looking at those clothes, discovered that there was only pockets in one of the men's three breeches. And so there were early adopters, you know, like, not everyone had them at first and over the 16th century they sort of become more and more in use. But I think where they go first and the reason that they're associated so much with menswear is that they go in those breeches. So think of Henry the VIII again. What is he wearing? He's got those huge weird, like, pumpkin, like, bloomers right around his legs. They're eventually gonna be trousers and it was super fashionable to wear them, to stuff them and to wear them really big. And there are all these jokes about all these fashionable men swaggering around with their breeches as big as barrels. And I don't know, no one has said this but I think maybe in having to stuff them, it eventually occurred to someone, "Oh, I could actually put useful stuff in here. Why not actually carry, you know, my handkerchief and my, you know, whatever" inside my pocket.

JVN // Yes for the history! So, and when they decided to start putting stuff in their pockets, like, because we have a lot of, you know, you think about like a pocket watch, pocket knife, pocketbook. Like, there's so many things that we, like, you know, pocket goes in the front of

the word. So, like, was there anything else that people were carrying in their pockets a lot of?

HANNAH CARLSON // Yeah, I mean, once you get pockets. It seems like people miniaturize all these useful objects to make sure that you have what you need, that you can sort of be mobile. The first really, first *notorious* object to be scaled for the pocket were handguns.

JVN // Ooooh!

HANNAH CARLSON // And they—handguns—I wanna show you this amazing image of the first assassination by handgun. What happens is that pistols were for a long time, several feet long. But they, there's this major innovation in the middle of the 16th century. And for the first time, you can make a gun that is a handgun that can fit in your pocket. And rulers in Europe get really worried, as they should. They came to fear this thing called a pocket pistol. The thing that seemed to really freak people out: your bravery wasn't obvious, but you could pull out of your pocket this hidden gun and undertake this assassination that could have, like, changed the sort of, the balance of world powers forever.

JVN // Oh my fucking God, I'm scared.

HANNAH CARLSON // Ok. So Queen Elizabeth was horrified and she starts making these proclamations. She says, "My subjects are in fear for their lives. Anyone holding these pocket guns in a time of peace could have only one purpose: to execute great and notable robberies and horrible murders." And so she tries, she and then her related ruler James the First try to stop the manufacture of small scale guns.

JVN // Oh, shit! Gun control in the 1600s.

HANNAH CARLSON // Yeah. And in France, they say, "You know what, you can't make pockets bigger than six inches." Meaning that, "Let's try to regulate the pocket and make it small enough that it wouldn't carry these small weapons." So, it's, it's something that's, you know, freaking people out.

JVN // So, the gun lobby has basically been working in all sorts of ways since the 1600s.

HANNAH CARLSON // Exactly, there you go. So pocket handguns, pocket dags, they were called, they are the most notorious object. But by the 18th century, the 1700s, when men begin to wear suits and pockets sort of proliferate, you've got breast pockets, inner breast pockets, pockets in your tails, pockets at your hips, they move all around lots and lots of objects get miniaturized. And so they sort of basically meant that you could move around the world, measure it, have weapons, have money, have a handkerchief or a toothpick, anything that you needed to sort of freely kind of engage.

JVN // Ok. I'm obsessed with that. So did the rise of—so obviously the rise of pockets then changed how clothes were designed and made because you got, like, pockets start to, like, move around. Like, how else do pockets kind of, like, innovate clothing? Like, did, is that, like, where tail suits came from or something? Like, did, like, does clothing greatly change or do they just start, like, really incorporating pockets into the already existing clothing?

HANNAH CARLSON // I think pockets get integrated with a kind of fervor. And what interests me, I think, at this point is that pockets are really, like, weird sort of hitchhikers. They're the only functional element of dress that have nothing to do with how you put on your clothes. Think of all the functional things we have: we've got buttons, we have zippers, laces, ties. That all means that you can get on and take off your clothes and fit them. The pocket has nothing to do with how you get dressed in the morning. Pockets suggest that

it's not all about your look, it's not all about achieving your look. It's also about making sure that you're prepared.

JVN // Yeah, I mean, honey, wait till we get to fishing jackets and cargo pants. I mean, shit, eventually it becomes all fucking pockets!

HANNAH CARLSON // Right!

JVN // OK. But wait. So at the beginning though, like when do we see in, like, the art record? Like, are people, like—when do people start, like, shoving their hands in their pockets or was that, like, cute or not cute? Like, did people, like, want to, like, give you an asymmetrical, like, hand in the hip pose, like, with, like, one little pocket, like, or, or was it, like, “Don't put your hands in there.” It was, like, only for, like, carrying stuff.

HANNAH CARLSON // So I think the suit definitely changes gestures. Once you have trouser pockets, then your gesture changes. It was, like, “Oh my God, I can put my hands anywhere.” It had been super elegant for courtiers around 1660s, when the suit is invented to put their hands over their chest like this. You know, you think of Napoleon Bonapart with it, you know, like, going in like this. But pretty soon courtiers figured out that it was much more sexy to put their hands in their trouser pockets and it was a sexy insouciant gesture for them.

JVN // What does “asouciant” mean?

HANNAH CARLSON // You know, like, what's the word—like, sort of casual?

JVN // That's a sexy word. We've never said that. But, oh, it's just kind of, like, it's, like, just, like, “I'm a cool person,” like, I just—

HANNAH CARLSON // Yes, insouciant is just, like—

JVN // casually cool.

HANNAH CARLSON // It's casually cool and of course it's a French word. So, you know, it's casually, cool and elegant.

JVN // Y'all. That's, like, a social beat right there, like, we need to—that's a whole meal right there, insouciant. I'm obsessed. Ok!

HANNAH CARLSON // So, yeah, so they were just, like, “Oh, we look really cool when we put our hands in our pockets,” right? And so, but for everyone else, like, especially people concerned with manners. This was a really vulgar gesture. Etiquette books, like, as soon as the 1750s are saying, “Only vulgar boys put their hands in their pockets!” But I think as we figured out from, say the #MeToo movement, expressions, you know, breaking the rules has always given men a certain kind of status. And so I think it's no, it's not at all surprising that it would be elite men who got to break the rules, who looked so cool and elegant and that other folks wanna copy them. And I think though the fun thing about holding your hands in your pockets, which is an important gesture in all of fashion history, the fashion pages are full of people with their hands in their pockets looking cool. It's not only etiquette that allows us to understand that gesture. I think when you put your hands in your pockets, you know, hands are almost as expressive as our face and our words and holding them there in private means, “I'm not gonna give you any information about me.”

JVN // And it also kind of can, like, cover up if you're fidgety as fuck. Like, it can make you seem more, like, self-assured and stuff. If you just don't know what to do, you just shove your hands in there because you're just, like, it makes you seem less fidgety. So you seem more confident.

HANNAH CARLSON // Exactly. And so it sort of oscillates between sort of sexual and sort of psychological, you know, you're contained, you're cool. You don't need anyone but you're also super, you're breaking the rules and that's sexy.

JVN // Interest! Okay, so let's get into what you call in the book "the pocket problem." So why has menswear historically had pockets but not womenswear, because everything comes down to that fucking gender binary, honey! We always, it's always the culprit!

HANNAH CARLSON // Yep. The gender disparity in pockets comes down to two things. I think it comes down to sort of manufacture and attitude. So in terms of the manufacture and the history of the development of the suit, the suit is rationalized and systematized like a century before women's clothes. So when pockets were handmade, and when clothes were made by hand, in the 1800s, pockets looked super different. You know, you might have more of them, they might be really decorated. A court suit from the 18th century might have lots of embroidery. But eventually menswear becomes really sedate, super plain after the French Revolution. And tailors figure out how to make clothes that are readymades. They figure out, for example, in 1820 that a tape measure is a useful thing. They start to measure men's bodies, they get average sizes, and they can basically make up suits really quickly. And the cost of suits goes way down. So let's say in 1824 someone called David Clapp, who was a printer's apprentice, and he had to devote two thirds of his income in a year to buying a new suit, some shirts, overcoat, hat. By the 1850s or 60s, he could have walked into Brooks Brothers and gotten that for—an off the rack version—for a fraction of the cost. So I think what happens is that menswear gets systematized, pockets are something that you just put in automatically, and men are good to go. Women's dress. You could not go into a store and buy a dress off the rack until the 20th century, until 1920. And, you know, before then, you had to go to a dressmaker. And there's no sort of sense of the fact that it should be just automatic to include pockets. But the, the second thing is just attitude, there's this notion that women won't use pockets and they don't need pockets.

JVN // Ugh! Which is very much also goes to, like, on this podcast, we've learned a lot about, like, you know, like, eugenics and Francis Galton and, like, the origins of the binary and, like, you know, like, women were seen as, like, reproductive vessels who, like, don't need to do anything utility-wise. Like, they're only meant to look pretty and carry babies. So, like, why would you need a fucking pocket? It's, like, it's giving that vibe, too.

HANNAH CARLSON // Exactly. Right. Right. Men's clothes are about utility. Women's are about beauty, and I've got this great example. Oh, and I have a picture. So the first time women go into the military in the 1940s, for World War Two, you know, they, they want some useful uniforms and the military brags that they're gonna make really great uniforms. But in the end because of beliefs about femininity, women end up having to wear skirts. They have jackets without pockets. And they carry this ridiculous purse with them to war. There's a woman who wrote a history of the Women's Auxiliary Core and she said they did, they had working breast pockets initially and they did these tests and they didn't like women opening up their pockets and getting anything out of their breast pockets. It was, like, too close to the body or something? And that's why they end up not having pockets. So I think notions about what we expect people to wear, and how they should be dressed trumps utility, *even* for the US military, *even* during a time of war.

JVN // So it made men uncomfortable having to, like, see or just, like, notice women's breasts, it made them feel like they were just gonna, like, haul off and, like, just start sexually assaulting everyone?! So they were, like, "No pockets! It, it's too dangerous for all these men." I mean, no one said that but it's, like, these, I hate how women are just, like, it's, like, the puritanism or puritanical something.

HANNAH CARLSON // There was all this controversy about women going into the military. There were rumors that WAACs were Amazons in disguise that they were maybe lesbians or prostitutes, they were hired to offer enlisted men company. So there was this anxiety about having women go into the military. And so in a way, the folks who were designing those uniforms wanted to assure everyone that, "Women in the military were still women," and so conflating function and femininity was a problem. And so a breast pocket is a problem because somehow if you put stuff in there, maybe the breast looked misshapen or something, maybe that was sort of a signal that you would "lose your femininity" if you were a fighter. And I think in a way that's why, that's why even the US military, you would think would be interested in function and utility bows to ideas about gender.

JVN // Right, that makes so much sense and none at the same time, I mean, it does, obviously, I just, yeah. Jeez. So how did women react to that? And just historically to the lack of pockets were women, like, "But wait, we need to fucking put our stuff somewhere," or, like, just generally, like, were women ever, like, "We want pockets? Why, why don't we get pockets in our dresses?" Like, was that ever a thing?

HANNAH CARLSON // That's a total thing. We tend to think that there's this recent sort of social media upset over this feminist question, "Why doesn't womenswear have pockets?" But it's not recent and you can trace it all the way back to about 1800 when women lose their tie-on pockets. Tie-on pockets are really useful bags worn under the skirt and tied around the waist. There's a beautiful book about women's tie-on pockets by [Barbara] Burman and [Ariane] Fennetaux called *The Pocket*. When women had their own equivalent, they didn't need and didn't care about men's pockets. But after 1800, think about that Empire-style dress, like, those Jane Austen movies where the waistline goes right to under the breast—

JVN // Like, very *Bridgerton*!

HANNAH CARLSON // Very *Bridgerton*. Very—so there's no room for a pocket. That's the first time women began to carry the first fashion handbags called reticules. But, so ever since that time women's pockets have been sometimes stitched into clothes, sometimes not, their access to pockets is not assured. And at that moment, you have a split between handbags and pockets. I say that, you know, after the skirt and trouser distinction, I think the handbag / pocket distinction is the next major sort of gender distinction in dress.

JVN // So is that that, like, women that went in pockets where the women who had reticules or, like, handbags were, like, "Oh, that's kind of too butch for me, like, only lady ladies wear, like, handbags and more, like, utility, like, butch ladies want pockets because, like," what—is that what it was or was it not that...

HANNAH CARLSON // I don't think it was that, I think...

JVN // Or they just wanted choices!

HANNAH CARLSON // They wanted choices. But it's not really until the women's suffrage movement, late 19th century, that women are much more vociferous about the fact that pockets are a feminist issue. Even the *New York Times* in 1899 said, "The world's use of pockets is uneven. Men's clothes are full of them while women have but few." Toad, the character in the children's book *Wind in the Willows* says, "If you don't have pockets, you're not equipped for the real contest." And he comes to this determination because he's cross dressed, he dresses as his washer woman in order to escape after he's been thrown in jail. And he says, you know, "This escaping in a dress is really terrible. I don't have my wallet. I can't get on the train and escape the police." So people are aware of it. In the late 19th century turn of the 20th century women's rights advocate, Elizabeth Cady Stanton was incensed by the contrast between women who had to sort of be encumbered. She wrote



several articles about not having pockets. She said that it was one of the unrecognized disabilities of women. So there's just this irritation, there's a demand for equality in pockets. Women began to agitate on "the right of women to be pocket-wearing people." So there are these great sort of phrases that are kind of echoing what we hear today on social media, you know, hashtags like, "Give me pockets or give me death." You know, that sort of agitation has just been around for, for quite a while and people were clear that it was that the material world had feminist implications.

JVN // Yes. And it's also interesting sidebar when we think about, like, you know, currently, like, there's certain types of feminism that leave out, like, trans voices and trans people. And I think at that time, it's interesting when we think about, like, how in the suffrage movement, like, Black women weren't included and wouldn't be included until, like, the sixties, how there's always been a, you know, within feminism, like, "We're irate about the lack of pockets, but we aren't necessarily irate that we aren't including, like, Black women in the right to vote." Like, I just, there's always been, like, a dichotomy within, you know, I think real feminism is, like, really, it's just like so much broader, but I still love, like, the history of it. Obviously, I'm just, like, pissed about anti-trans law. So sister's really thinking about it all the time right now. OK. So, but that, but let's go into our next question, which is interesting. So you note that enslaved people were also denied clothing with pockets, as were people who wore slop clothes—which we literally just learned about from Meaghan Walker. So what can we learn about these groups' status through their clothing? And how did enslaved people adjust their clothing as a way to gain power?

HANNAH CARLSON // Okay, so when clothes are made by hand in the 18 hundreds, they're wildly different. They look different. I think I mentioned that pockets come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. Some are highly decorative and ornate and some people don't have any clothes at all. And I was curious about this and started looking through. There are lots of databases and archives that have a host of runaway ads. And runaway ads in the 18th and early 19th century were sort of descriptions that people who had servants or slaves would write in the hope of capturing those people. There are lots of descriptions of clothing there, and in those descriptions, a couple of things become apparent. One, that there were some people who had no pockets in their clothes. There's this account of a runaway who had "coats without pockets or pocket flaps." So it's clear that something like a pocket is a detail that we would assume is just there. But in the 1800s, you might not. But the other thing that is, I think, fascinating is that these are records written by enslavers. So you can't necessarily trust them. But when they're writing, they talk about, "It looks as though enslaved people altered their clothes just before escaping." In one runaway advertisement, the enslaver notes that someone named Edam dyed his cotton jacket brown and then put pockets and cuffs to it, suggesting that Edam had a knowledge about fashion. But also that when Edam got to some, like, cosmopolitan port city like Charleston that he would want to pass himself off as free.

JVN // Totally. That's so—that's, well, heartbreaking and fascinating at the same time. And then what about, like, the slop clothes thing?

HANNAH CARLSON // Well, I think the, the thing about slop clothes is that they were the first readymade clothes, and they were first meant for sailors. And at first they're really poorly made. Sailors were off for several years at a time. And you wanted to buy something cheap that would keep you clothed. It's from that industry though, that we figure out how to make readymade clothes the way that we do today. And so if you bought slop-made clothes, you might or might not have pockets, they're not standard.

JVN // So you also write about the Macaroni Boys, which we love the Macaroni Boys. We learned about that from David Yi. What do they have to do with pocket history?

HANNAH CARLSON // Well, I think the just amazing thing about the Macaroni, and I'll remind everyone that they were this subculture of young men who were really, really fashionable clothing in Britain. They'd gone around on their grand tours in Europe and they saw that people were dressing really extravagantly, and they wanted to, too. Because meanwhile, in Britain, clothes had sort of gotten very sober. The sober suit is gonna be what happens after the French Revolution, when people reject monarchy. But they also just had so much fun with fashion. They wore huge wigs, beautifully colored jackets, and they were known for carrying their hands in their pockets. And so I think that's part of my evidence to suggest that that hand-in-pockets pose is not a real gesture at all. That it begins, actually, with aristocrats, that it's fashionable to hold your hands in your pockets. The fact that Macaroni—some of them who were not aristocrats but were just trying to look like them—had all these cartoons that were printed everywhere. And people saw these cartoons and they noted that this group in particular, they're typically depicted or often depicted with their hands in their pockets. So I just, for me, it's this evidence, "Aha!" you know, "This gesture comes from the elite."

JVN // Yes, because Yankee Doodle went to town riding on a pony, stuck a feather in his hat and he called it macaroni, girl!

HANNAH CARLSON // Exactly.

JVN // So, like, it was, like, so the feather in the hat was, like, the thing of it being ornate, which is, like, why you would have called it Macaroni, because, like, only the Macaroni Boys, like, wore, like, ornate things because everyone else is trying to do, like, pared down realness. Right?

HANNAH CARLSON // Exactly, exactly! You have it! And they didn't want that pared down realness.

JVN // Now, what about gay stuff? Was that another way for them to say, like, that the Macaroni's, like, maybe sucking some D or is that, like, outside of our research or, like...

HANNAH CARLSON // For me, the, the interest is, "Oh, what does this gesture suggest?" I think it's suggests something about sexuality, something about sexuality that's not quite, you know, heteronormative that, yeah, their hands are near their genitals, and they're interested in sex. And the pose is sort of rude, in a way, because sexuality is so clear, you know what I mean?

JVN // Yes!

HANNAH CARLSON // Like, sexuality is on, is on display and that's supposed to be celebrated and in a way these prints are, you see them all over, like, they were, they were popular and it sort of almost taught, you know, certain people had a dress, like, here was the model, even if we're kind of making fun of them, they're kind of also gorgeous. You know, so that's I think part of the tension and the interest in some of these images, right? And that's what the pockets mean here, you know?

JVN // That is so fucking cool. Our query ancestors were like a literally like doing the damn thing!

HANNAH CARLSON // and they were showing how to do it with, like—

JVN // Class! Fierceness!

HANNAH CARLSON // Class, right—and everyone copied them.

JVN // Yes! Tale as old as time. [SINGING] Tail as old as time. It's so true, like, rising in the east or whatever the next lyric is, it's, you know, from Beauty And The Beast. I'm obsessed with this story. I can't stand it. I'm obsessed so much. I can't even get over it. Oh, what about the gesture of the Macaroni? Did their hands in pockets change the silhouette of the, of their clothing or, well, it just—

HANNAH CARLSON // I've noticed in descriptions of them that their pockets are discussed as quite baggy. Other than that though, their suit coats were super slim to show off this beautiful chest. And so tailors had to forego the pockets at the hips. However, a sign of the fact that men insist on utility or that tailors always grant them utility in their clothes: once the Macaroni jacket lost its hip pocket, tailors invented the breast coat, the interior breast coat pocket. And so from 1770, that interior breast coat pocket became a standard.

JVN // Obsessed.

HANNAH CARLSON // Right? And that's a pocket that women still don't have. Like, I would love an interior breast coat pocket. It seems so useful in a jacket but still very rare, I think.

JVN // Yes! Inequality, no more! OK, wait, so we talked earlier about the reticules. And we do go from, like, the reticule to, like, a modern handbag, right? Like, isn't that, like, the earliest, like, kind of modern handbag? That cute little dangly thing? But obviously, as what we were just saying, there's still no breast pocket in women's stuff. So have handbags really solved the pocket problem or just prolonged it. Not that I'm anti-bag, because you know, I love a bag. Everyone knows we love a bag.

HANNAH CARLSON // They don't. And I mean, I think some people love bags, but it requires the use of your hand, and you have to be constantly diligent about where you put it down. And—

JVN // That's true—

HANNAH CARLSON // “Did you remember to take it off the bus? And did you have it with you after...”

JVN // That's why I only fuck with cross bodies. You guys, I only cross bodies because, like, you just—it's inconvenient. That's what I've learned, like, because, like, a clutch? Too risky, it's just too risky.

HANNAH CARLSON // Exactly, exactly, And so a lot of people were really vocally critical suffragists called handbags, “That badge of servitude.” It was, like, a sign—before the bag comes back into fashion recently, as you suggested, like, there are amazing men's bags. Now, there's the cross body bag, there's bags by Dior and Louis Vuitton. There's Supreme. It's becoming more and more fashionable. But this is recent. This is only, like, the past 15 years. And so before that, if you had a handbag, it was—you were saying something about your gender, you had to lug around this bag.

JVN // Oh, I had to, like, steal my mom's as a little child because—

HANNAH CARLSON // Right, so you remember!

JVN // Like, I wanted a messenger bag. I mean originally we called it, like, “a messenger bag.” I remember being, like, 10 and I was, like, “I need a messenger bag.” Like I, I, like, I was saying I needed a cross body. I just didn't even know yet. And as a child, I always stole my mom's bags because, like, anyone who has cute taste knows that they need a bag sometimes. But that's just my experience, darling. I know that other people don't want them and there is a sign of inequality. But as a femme presenting person, I've always just wanted bags.

HANNAH CARLSON // No, so, so don't get me wrong! Bags are great and people love bags. But that, but the fact that you would *have* to carry a bag and only a bag is what is, what got people down.

JVN // Hundo p! Yeah, 100%. I also think that there's something to be said here about human nature and, like, the things that people tell you you're supposed to do, you always want the things that people tell you you're not supposed to have! You know? Like, no one, like, no human likes any other human deciding what the rules are, like, absolutely going to be. I mean, obviously as far as like murder and stuff like we should like, you know, that's true. You know, I think we can all agree on those sorts of things, but it's, like, people don't like them telling, like, "You can't wear a bag because you're a man," and no one likes being told that they can't have a pocket because they're a woman! Like we just, we want fucking equal goddamn rights! Now, here's an important connection that we haven't gotten to yet as we wrap up, which is the connection, the very typical, obvious connection between pockets and the Supreme Court. Can you walk us through which—you know, not that obvious or typical, but, you know, we do live in America, so I'm not surprised. Can you walk us through the 1999 SCOTUS case *Wyoming v. Houghton*? Yeah. So what was the deal with that?

HANNAH CARLSON // Well, that's a case that comes down to the question, really, "What is a purse?" So in this case, there was this routine traffic stop. A Wyoming highway patrol officer notices a hypodermic syringe in the driver's shirt pocket. Stops the car. Totally legal. The officer then searches the car for contraband, including the passenger in the car [*Sandra Houghton*]. And he finds drug paraphernalia in her purse. She starts a court case and says, "Look, that purse was the fruit of an unlawful search. You know, what you found in my purse was against the Fourth Amendment, which requires that you have probable cause before you can search anything." So there's no suspicion that she's done anything wrong. And in this case, Wyoming says, "Well, we can search her purse, that's totally fine." However, if you were a suspicionless *male* passenger in the car who happened to be wearing pockets, those pockets would be protected. So the Fourth Amendment protects you from unreasonable search and seizure. And so the question comes down to, "What really is a purse?" Do we—we as a society understand that a purse should be as protected, you know, "as a billfold or wallet in a pocket." And in general, most states agree. And it's only three states—Ohio, Wyoming, and Montana—that, that equate the purse with the other objects in that car as something that you could search.

JVN // So *Houghton* lost?! So Wyoming won?! Because they're, like, "Yeah, they can say that the, that the purse doesn't count as a pocket."

HANNAH CARLSON // Yeah. So it went to the Supreme Court! Justice Scalia authored the majority opinion and as far as I know it's still not been overturned. And he says, you know, "Purses can be equated with other containers in the car, like briefcases and knapsacks that you throw in the trunk. They're all subject to search." Justice Breyer wrote a concurring opinion. He said, you know, "Purses are special containers. I'm tempted to say that a search of a purse involves an intrusion so similar to a search of one's person that the same rule should govern both pockets and purses." But he ends up agreeing with Scalia. And he said, you know, "If she had been wearing her purse in her lap, I might have called it a kind of outer clothing which we couldn't search."

JVN // Hmm. So what does this case tell us about pockets and our right to privacy?

HANNAH CARLSON // Well, I think that in this case, it suggests that in three states of the union, the right to privacy is actually slightly gendered.

JVN // And now with Dobbs, I think it's even more so! If you couldn't see it before, we definitely can see it now. So what do you think is, what's the future of pockets, like, can womenswear catch up to menswear with its, you know, with its lock on pockets? Do you think it's going to become more accessible for women's clothing?

HANNAH CARLSON // I mean, I think it depends on where we're looking, what kind of clothing we're thinking about sportswear, outdoor gear, so functional, plenty of great pockets. Professional or business wear that gets iffy, really fast. Eveningwear? Forget about it. It is so rare to find evening wear with good pockets that there have been articles about wedding dresses or Academy Award gowns with pockets in them. So I think today, since about 2016, there's been so much more attention placed on this issue. Many brands today are specifically highlighting their inclusion of pockets and that's great. But when we think of the industry as a whole, it's made of so many manufacturers, so many brands. And you know, the first thing a fast fashion company will do is not, not want the bother of including a pocket. So I, I teach at the Rhode Island School of Design and my students tell me, "It's hard to add a pocket!" You really have to fuss and work with it. So it doesn't crumple, you have to keep doing it and doing it again. So the first thing if you're saving money and cutting costs—and you know, fast fashion does this all the time—is that you can let go of the pocket, you don't include it. And so famous women designers like the American sportswear designer Claire McCardell. She had to consistently insist and fight with her production manager to make sure that she could include the pockets because he knew that they would have that extra, that extra cost. So if we think about the mass of clothing and how much bad fast fashion there is, then there's a lot more, there's a lot more clothing that's being produced without thoughtful design.

JVN // Mm, that makes sense.

HANNAH CARLSON // And I do think, though, that maybe bags will change faster. I think fashion is accepting menswear bags faster, maybe, than we're getting the assurance that womenswear can have pockets. Like, people love bags, and I think they're becoming non-gender. You're on the fashion vanguard! But I think people are gonna be catching up with you, and I think all sorts of people are gonna be wearing those cross bags and, you know, whatever kinds of bag. And that might happen before women have reliable access—or womenswear, I should say—has reliable access to pockets.

JVN // Well, if, if we say that, you know, kids are the future, do you think that, you know, young girls or, like, girls' clothing can solve the pocket problem? Like, do you think that, like, young women are gonna be, like, "No fuckers! Like, we want our goddamn pockets!"

HANNAH CARLSON // There have been some really great cases in the press of young girls who have registered their protest. There was that first grader from Arkansas who wrote to Old Navy and said, "I want jeans with functional pockets, like, get working, Old Navy!" And so there's this wonderful sense that, you know, they as consumers are making some demands. I think what children's clothing and clothing meant to, meant for girls, what it really suggests is how much cultural ideas get imposed on children. And so at the time, if you and I walk into the mall today, we're gonna find children's and girls' clothing that is not very functional at all compared to the same offerings for the boyswear. And I think what it reveals is that culture still determines how clothing is made. Our ideas about what women and girls can do and what they should be doing is still, like, so retrograde when it comes to how that shows up in how we make our clothes. And it gives a lie to this whole idea that women don't want pockets. There's this sort of idea that, "You know what? Women don't want bulky pockets, they are the ones who have given it up." That's totally untrue if you think, "Well, girls never said that they wanna carry rocks and toys and LEGOs in their

pockets, you know, they want pockets, but in fact, they don't have them because we believe that they don't need them."

JVN // Yes, I mean, that's such a mic drop right there. What about, like, the future of pockets? As far as, like, technology? Do you think that, like, phones and things could just all get so teeny tiny or, like, everything could become so digitized that we just don't even need them anymore.

HANNAH CARLSON // I mean, that's a question from technologists, folks who are working on wearables and smart textiles. They're hoping that they can sort of erase the interface between tools and clothes.

JVN // Is the fisherman's jacket safe? Is cargo pants safe? Or is AI coming for that, too?

HANNAH CARLSON // I think that I think that it's safe because people still love pockets. If all of our tools are woven into our cloth, then we don't have control over our tools. If all of our tools are in our clothing, if everything is networked, there's danger. Let's say you're in some sort of state where it's an authoritarian state, you can be tracked. I mean, you know, you have no safety.

JVN // One thing we've learned about with Meredith Broussard, who's our, like, resident AI expert who we love—and just tech expert. She taught us this word or this idea that we love, which is called techno chauvinism, which is like, there's nothing wrong with like, you know, going to your blind and like opening up the fucking blind. Like if it's always on a, you know, a machine and the machine breaks, you gotta get a repair person. And it's like we, and obviously, I mean, I think sometimes there's accessibility issues there because, like, maybe for someone who has a certain disability, like, it's really nice to be able to, like, press a button or whatever. But still the idea remains the same of, like, this idea of techno chauvinism, and we are giving away so much of our control of our autonomy. Like if we lose, if, if there's no, if everything becomes so ingrained and so networked and so, like, it, it just, it builds up a lot of world for it to fall or, like, not work.

HANNAH CARLSON // I think that's exactly, that's exactly it. Right. Like, you want your pockets almost as a safeguard.

JVN // We've learned so much about pockets. I feel complete. I feel like we got history. I wanna know more about you, Hannah. So what draws you to studying pockets? What's it like to research them? What have been some, we've already seen some of the archival finds but is there, is there a story or a find that's really stood out to you in your research?

HANNAH CARLSON // So I have had so much fun doing this. It has been such a joy. I am, like, a crazy research hound. I just totally get excited and I come home and my poor family is, like, rolling their eyes because I tell them another pocket story and they're, like, "Please enough, you know, no more!" But I think it was just so surprising that you could move through 500 years of history and find so much. And I think in the end, it's because pockets really tell, you know, they talk about humans, like, about what you need, about who you are, about what you're scared of. You know, references to pockets show up in politics and literature, theater, law, etiquette, custom, fashion. It's just, they're everywhere. And I had so I think any researcher maybe finds that. And who did you have on recently? Like, maybe there are microbes everywhere too, right? Like, it's just, once you get infatuated by something you can't let it go. I've just had such a blast.

And I think a lot of people when I say I'm writing a book about pockets, they say, "You're what?" Like there's this one response that's, like, "Oh, you've got to be kidding me. Like, oh, what does you mean? Like the pockets in my pants?" And, and then! They kind of walk off, like, "This woman is nuts." But then there's this second group you are included who are

really excited and say, "Oh my God, I've never thought about that." Or, "Oh my God, pockets! I've always, I *only* buy a dress that has pockets. I get so excited when it has pockets, I twirl around and say, 'It's got pockets!'" You know, so it's, so I'm hoping that the book speaks to that second group, but then maybe also just convince that first group that something so small as a pocket has just so much history, so many stories to tell. And I think those stories have to do with really who we are and what we need in the world to get by.

JVN // Let's say someone is still listening or they're still here with us and they're, like, "You know, it's not pockets but I really wanna research XYZ. And I just don't know, like, where do I go research? Like, where do I find, like, a..." Like, what, like, what did you find you spent most of your time on when you were, like, researching something? Is it, like, the Library of Congress archives? Like, where does the historian or, like, a researcher go? Or is it just, like, everywhere? Like, where did you spend the most time researching?

HANNAH CARLSON // That question I don't think I can answer because it was sort of everywhere. So I looked at objects and I went to museums and I put my hands in pockets and, you know, like, took pictures and thought about garments themselves. A lot of the evidence, there are, like, 130 images in my book. I mean, there's just so many visuals. And that came from, yes, the Library of Congress, all sorts of museums and all sorts of databases. I think the incredible—I think I could only have written this book now because you can search the word "pocket" in something like Early English Books Online and that's free on the Internet and it's an archive that's available to everyone. And I think before there were databases like that. You would, you would never know that a mention of pocket say shows up in Chaucer. It would just be too hard to find like a needle in a—

JVN // Needle in a haystack.

HANNAH CARLSON // That's the expression. Yeah. And so it's a combination of all those things, like, being willing to try. So this is a, this is gonna answer the research question, too. So here's LIFE magazine. If you go to Google Books, you can see all of LIFE magazine, every single article and this is just this darling image. Some mom decided that whenever she washed her son's clothes, she would save the articles in their pockets and she collected them over a year. And then the LIFE photographer Ralph Morse hoisted those boys up, you know, by their feet and displayed all those objects under them in this sort of great image. So first of all, we learn about 1957 and what they thought was important, you know, the letters to Captain Midnight and everything. But I could find that because LIFE magazine is scanned, and everyone can search it!

JVN // Hannah. It's so amazing. So, final question, and then we're out: has studying pockets, like, changed your approach to your wardrobe or, like, how you interact with pockets?

HANNAH CARLSON // Yeah, I think about it. I think about, "What does it feel like to walk through the world without a bag?" And it's pretty good, I have to say, but it's not always achievable. You have to spend some time. If you want to wear, like, good women's workwear, you have to find, like, functional chic. I, I was thinking, "What am I gonna do for this book tour?" I'm gonna have to find some good clothes, and I'm a terrible shopper. And so I'm gonna have to go find something fabulous. So, maybe I'm gonna have to get back to you and tell you about how I shopped.

JVN // Well, I know that you're determined and you're an incredible author and an incredible historian! Hannah Carlson, thank you so much for coming on Getting Curious, author of *Pockets: An Intimate History of How We Keep Things Close*. Thank you so much for coming on Getting Curious. We appreciate you so much.

HANNAH CARLSON // Thank you. I had such a blast.

JVN // Yay! You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. You can learn more about this week's guest and their area of expertise in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on, honey! You can follow us on Instagram @CuriousWithJVN, yes! Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ - thank you so much to her for letting us use it. Our editor is Nathanael McClure. Getting Curious is produced by me, Erica Getto, Chris McClure, and Allison Weiss. With production support from Julie Carrillo, Anne Currie, and Samantha Martinez.