

## **The Mullet: A Rhetorical Statement, Then and Now**

A few years ago I was “chatting” with a friend on the Internet, and he asked me if I’d ever heard of a website called *Mulletsgalore.com*. I’d never seen the site, so he sent me a quick link to it. I asked him, “What’s a mullet anyway?” He said, “just look at the site—you’ll see.”

It didn’t take me long to figure out what a mullet was after visiting the site. In fact, when I saw the first photograph of the guy displayed on the screen, I knew exactly what a mullet was. I recognized the “business in the front, party in the back” hairstyle the guy had—my oldest brother sported one in the late 80’s. Back then, I didn’t think anything about the hairstyle itself simply because it wasn’t anything unusual to see; however, sporting a mullet today is more than just a hairstyle worn to stay up-to-date with the current trends. The mullet has become a statement of individuality for those who sport it—and for those who don’t, the mullet is either mere comedy or a symbol of ignorance. The mullet was once a facet of the many popular trends in the 80’s and early 90’s. But now, there are mixed feelings towards the mullet—and it certainly doesn’t have the same dominant appeal like it did when it was just another fashionable hairstyle.

In the following paragraphs I will discuss several different aspects of the mullet hairstyle. I will first give a brief history of the mullet. From there, my second discussion will examine the mullet hairstyle, and its crossbreeds. The spirit of the essay will appear when I begin my third discussion, which will illustrate the three ideologies introduced by the mullet hairstyle genre.

## History of the Mullet

**“The Mullet:** Hesh/rocker style ‘do. Short (often spikey) on top and at ears, long in back. Think Journey” (Retro Hell, 136). Well, the mullet hairstyle didn’t necessarily originate from the rock group, Journey. The history of the mullet is still quite a mystery, but there are a few clues as to where it originated from. One newspaper article read, “The origin of the style can be contributed as far back as ancient Greece. In the Iliad, Homer writes, ‘The spring Abantes followed hard at his heels, their forelocks cropped, hair grown long at the back.’” (Rofls). In the book, *The Mullet: Hairstyle of the Gods*, authors Larson and Hoskyns write, “if artists’ impressions are anything to go by, the original mullet dates all the way back to the dawn of human civilization” (Reese). Although the origin of the mullet still remains unknown, the mullet hairstyle is still recognized for its unique style.

## The Mullet Hairstyle and its Crossbreeds

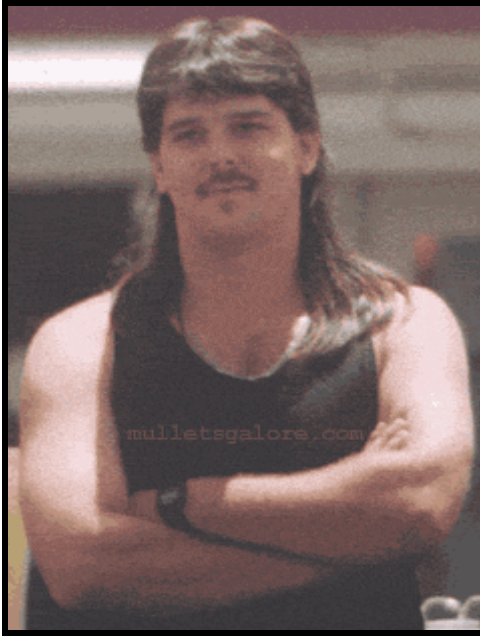
The mullet hairstyle is widely recognized for its short hair on the top and long hair in the back. All the while, the mullet can be grouped into several different classifications based on the shape or form of the mullet hairstyle. These different forms represent a series of stereotyped personalities for those who sport the mullet. *Mulletsgalore.com*, the website I referenced earlier, takes a close look into the different mullet hairstyles and classifies each known form of the mullet and also characterizes the person’s personality who sports it. Below is a short list of the different mullet hairstyle classifications and their definitions, which can be found on the *Mulletsgalore.com* website.

- **Feathermullet** - Distinguishing characteristics include: Z Cavaricci, Reebok, IZOD, Gecko, Mitsubishi.
- **CamaroMullet** - Distinguishing features include: a molester mustache (peach fuzzy), tight-fitting acid wash jeans, and an ever-present key ring hanging from the belt loop.
- **Minitruckmullet** - The minitruckmullet has only the bottom part of his hairline on the base of his neck long.
- **Femullet (fem-mullet)** - There are many varieties of the femullet--and contrary to popular belief, not all femullets are dykemullets, but all dykemullets are definitely femullets.

Other common names for the mullet that can be found on the [mulletsgonemad.com](http://mulletsgonemad.com) website are as follows:

- **Hockey Hair**
- **Canadian Passport**
- **Yep – Nope**
- **The Ape Drape**
- **Tennessee Tophat**
- **Mudflap**
- **Dirt Stick**
- **Butt Rocket**

**Figure 1** is an example of a complete mullet classification, which can be directly found on the *Mulletsgalore.com* website—and what better example to use than the classic mullet classification.



**Classic Mullet:** This specimen is a clear demonstration of a classic mullet. Note how this mullet proudly displays his exotic plumage while in a menacing stance—classic indeed. The mesh tank-top, digital watch, silver chain, and molester mustache all add points to this fine specimen's overall look and mulletude.

**Mulletude:** 10

**Aggressiveness:** 10

**Hobbies:** football games, wife beating, picking fights.

**Sightings:** everywhere, there's no escape (see: eyes).

**Favorite Band:** Steve Miller Band

**Figure 1**

The writers of *Mulletsgalore.com* make no claim for the mullet hairstyle other than it's a style that will always be around. Jim Corder, author of *From Rhetoric Into Other Studies*, clearly explains the immortality of styles. "Audiences and occasions sometimes vanish, sometimes to reappear, but invention, structure, and style are never lost." (104).

The mullet classifications and definitions presented by *Mulletsgalore.com* are just a few examples of how people perceive the mullet hairstyle. By examining the *Mulletsgalore.com* website as well as other subjects of mullet interest, I will be able to show that there is more than one ideology at work—specifically in the United States (U.S.) today.

### **The First Ideology – Mullet Love**

There is a lot of mullet madness going on in the U.S. Just think about the *Mulletsgalore.com* website. Someone must think highly of the mullet hairstyle to even create a website dedicated to it. What is more interesting is that there are a

countless number of websites dedicated to the mullet. When I typed “mullet hairstyle” into the Yahoo! search engine, a total of 2,980 names of websites came up. Granted, there are probably repeated websites listed and there are more than likely websites that just touch on the subject of mullets. Regardless of that fact, there are plenty of websites that discuss the mullet. There is even a shampoo made for the mullet! The shampoo is called, “Vibrant Mullet Shampoo,” which is being sold on a website called Sesto-Senso, a website that sells bath and body products. The ad for the mullet shampoo reads as follows:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Vibrant Mullet Shampoo</b> Formulated for all mullets and rat-tails Limp, tired mullets can be a harsh toke. Vibrant Mullet Shampoo is the magical formula you have been waiting for, makes every style mullet rock and shine. Muscle Car scent.</p>
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Yet another sign of mullet madness is presented in a recent article written by the Associated Press (A.P.). According to the A.P., people gathered in Huntsville, Alabama for the cities first ever “Mulletfest”. “The few dozen partygoers wore overalls, flannel shirts, and sleeveless undershirts and dined on fried pigskins, Moon Pies, and RC Cola. They watched mullet movies, received free mullet haircuts, and competed in a mullet haiku contest” (A.P).

There even seems to also be a fixation with mullet poems. The following poem was found on *llovemullets.com* website:

**“Mullet Desires”**

Yesterday I went to the mall,  
I saw the coolest mullet of all.

I thought having a mullet would be a disaster,  
But this guy was like a mullet master.

With short hair and then long,  
Not loving a mullet would be wrong.

Mullets are so 1980s,  
But the mullet gets all the ladies.

The way his mullet blew in the air,  
Oh how I love the greasy 80s hair.

That guy's hair was black as ash,  
If I get mullet will I look like Trailer Trash!

Mullets are so great,  
My dad had one in 1988.

I want to have a mullet that I can braid,  
The hairstyle of mullets will never fade.

A Louisiana State University (LSU) student was recently quoted in February of 2003 as saying, “The bi-level haircut is no longer confined to the trailer parks of America. It is now rampant in society as a symbol to be respected and feared. Let’s face it, chicks love a man with mulletude” (Rofls). We can conclude through these observations that there is indeed some mullet madness out there, which points out the first ideology—mullet love.

The quote from the LSU student brings up an interesting question. Do people still correlate a mullet hairstyle with trailer parks? This brings us to our second ideology.

### **The Second Ideology – Change is a Good Thing**

“We are always in a rhetoric. We may see others in rhetorics not our own; if we do, they are likely to seem whimsical, odd, uninformed, selfish, wrong, mad

even alien” (Corder, 98). People who do not like the mullet hairstyle are those who either never liked it or just feel like it’s a style that has gone way out of style. I recently did a survey regarding the today’s ideology of mullets. I asked six students, ages 21 to 23, who currently attend the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) the following questions:

1. How old are you?
2. Are you male or female?
3. What is a mullet in your opinion?
4. What did the mullet represent in the 80’s when it was “trendy?”
5. What does the mullet represent to you now?
6. When you see a male with a mullet, what do you think about him?
7. When you see a female with a mullet, what do you think about her?
8. Did you ever have a mullet? If so, did you have it because that was what was in style? Give other reason(s) if that wasn’t the case.
9. Do you have a mullet now--if so, why?

Two out of the 6 students did not know what a mullet was; therefore, they were unable to respond to the survey. The other 4 students were able to provide their opinion. The most interesting outcome of the survey results was that all four students seemed to have the same idea or belief about the mullet. To give you an idea on some of their beliefs, I’ve compiled all 4 of the student’s responses for questions 4 and 5.

**4. What did the mullet represent in the 80’s when it was “trendy?”**

**Student 1** - The same thing "Members Only" jackets and Leg Warmers did, ugly funky things were cool.

**Student 2** - I'm not really sure, I was barely a couple of days born and not even a year old.

**Student 3** - Clueless.

**Student 4** - Business in the front, party in the back.

**5. What does the mullet represent to you now?**

**Student 1** - A status symbol of trailer park trash and lesbians

**Student 2** - Someone who got a really bad haircut

**Student 3** - Laughter

**Student 4** - Trashy, redneck, etc.

As you can see, all of the students show some kind of dislike towards the mullet hairstyle. Even the reporter who went to the Mulletfest, mentioned earlier, noted the following observations about the people there: “The few dozen partygoers wore overalls, flannel shirts and sleeveless undershirts and dined on fried pigskins, Moon Pies and RC Cola “(A.P.). What do overalls and flannel shirts represent to you? To some it would represent someone who either is a farmer or is just a plain ‘ole hillbilly.

The mullet is just another part of our past-time—it’s another way some of us *used* to wear our hair. Cultures are ever-changing. Over the years we seem to change the way we raise our families, the way we dress, and even the way we fix our hair. It is fair to say that one reason for change is brought on by the need for improvement. “[...] Each successive generation may regard itself as at once the destroyer, preserver, and improver of the culture which it has inherited from its predecessor” (Aiken, 76). We can conclude through these observations that the mullet hairstyle can often times give the impression that someone who sports one is a redneck (i.e. lives in the backwoods and isn’t up-to-date with today’s trends). We can also conclude the mullet hairstyle is a style of the past. Both observations thus point out the second ideology—change is a good thing. This ideology seems to be the dominant one as well. While you have dozens of websites dedicated to the mullet hairstyle and even a book written about it, with the same token, they also present the mullet hairstyle to be worn by people who are rednecks or are trashy (i.e. tacky). “The stereotype would be muscle cars,

sports and rock music. Most people associate the mullet with trailer trash and generic beer” (Reese).

I noted earlier how the 4 students responded to 2 specific questions. There was one student who answered “laughter” to the question regarding how they felt about a mullet now. This brings us to our third ideology.

### **Comedy – Let’s Make Fun of the Mullet**

I was visiting a site called *Ratemymullet.com*, and on the homepage was the following ad:

Get laughed at... get your ass kicked... without having to grow a mullet: Original Mullet Wig

The ad itself represents the mullet as something to laugh at. The *Mulletsgalore.com* website has the same idea behind it. When you read the classifications and definitions, you can tell instantly that they were written in such a way to make you laugh. I did a presentation on the mullet hairstyle, and one of my handouts showed several full classifications of the mullet hairstyle. I observed that quite a few people laughed at the classifications. We can conclude that the mullet hairstyle is something more than just a hairstyle to people—it’s something to laugh at. “I think you’ve got a good segment of people who like these haircuts in an affectionate way but still make fun of them.” (Reese). These observations thus points out the third ideology—let’s make fun of the mullet.

### **Conclusion**

I have shown through examples and observations that there is a fascination with the mullet hairstyle. Whether the fascination is with how great

they are, how awful they are, or how incredibly funny they are, the mullet may just be one of the most talked about hairstyles in the U.S. today. To those of us who remember the mullet hairstyle from the 80's and early 90's, it holds some kind of significance in our lives—for me, it reminds me of my oldest brother. For others, it may just remind them of someone they saw at the NASCAR races. Either way you look at it, the mullet is everywhere. “The debris of all our generations is around us and in us” (Corder).

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