

Chapter Three

Oh there's an easy assumption that one could make here, right? You could say oh well of course Japanese teenagers started wearing American clothes because Japan was occupied by America immediately after WWII. But that's not the reason why Japan teenagers would start to dress like Princeton students.

[01:15:28] The American influence of "I'm going to see it and then dress like that- it wasn't possible and it didn't happen.

That's W. David Marx, author of *Ametora*. He says that right after the war, it wasn't like the average Japanese citizen could afford to dress like an American even if they wanted to.

Everyone was poor. Nobody had access to enough money to dress like them anyway.

Also American soldiers didn't exactly dress preppy.

[01:15:07] They're all just wearing standard uniforms. If you could get onto the base, which was not something that everybody was able to do, you could see them dressed casually. If you went to the black markets, you could buy some of their used clothing. But it wasn't like you could just look at American soldiers and say, I want to do that.

But eventually American clothing- shiny new trendy American clothing DID become popular in Japan- and it was not an inevitability. It had to overcome a lot of obstacles to get to that place.

[01:15:49] The reason Ivy league style became big in Japan in the 60s was a coordinated marketing effort to basically indoctrinate young people into being Ivy League converts. And that can be traced to literally a single person.

[pause]

Kensuke Ishizu eventually got out of the prison camp in China. And in 1946, when he was 34 years old, Ishizu, his family, and hundreds of others, were put on a cargo ship and sent back to Japan. Everything Ishizu owned could now fit in one backpack.

Marx[00:09:22] He came back to Japan. Everything was devastated. His hometown had been bombed.

completely burned to the ground. American bombs had leveled almost every major industrial area in Japan. Rubble was everywhere. Ishizu would have to make a completely fresh start for himself.

Didn't know really what to do. And then he said, you know, the thing I'm really passionate about is making men's clothing

After all, Ishizu had always been devoted to clothing- from trying to make his black rigid Gakuran look special and different, to becoming a shabby bankara boy, to his three piece brown tweed suit he tried out. Even during the war he spent his time in a glycerin factory making luxurious scented soaps. The man had style and luxury in his veins. Even upon coming back to the devastation of postwar Japan.

And he believed there was an opportunity, especially with the clothing shortage, to make ready to wear clothing and provide this also to wealthy people. So he started his own men's clothing brand.

And he called it

Masafumi: [00:06:40] *Van Jacket*

Van Jacket.

which is a clothing company in 1951

Professor Masafumi Monden of the University of Sydney.

and a van jacket. create sort of like a men's wear targeting at older men. So they created like a normal business suits

But Ishizu found Van Jacket was a hard sell. And not because it was too fancy. It wasn't fancy enough. It was a ready to wear clothing company

Marx: The issue he had is all the wealthy people, all the wealthy men in Japan rejected the idea of buying ready to wear clothing because it was just seen as an inferior

Ishizu needed to convince consumers that ready to wear clothes could be elegant! That lots of wealthy Americans and Europeans already bought their clothes off the rack! And his main vehicle for his argument was a magazine called Men's club

Marx: [00:32:01] In 1954, Kensuke Ishizu had helped start this magazine called Men's Club. And Men's Club still publishes today. [00:32:19] And in this magazine, they were trying to convince people how to dress in ready-to-wear clothing. And Kensuke Ishizu wanted to do ready to wear clothing. And so he became basically the sponsor, the patron of this magazine.

But it wasn't working. Men's Club wasn't changing anyone's mind and the established elite who could afford it wanted to continue to buy their tailored suits as they always had. So it dawned on Ishizu that he should just try to get a whole new consumer base.

Marx [00:10:24] one of the things he realized is- I need to find a consumer group that hasn't made their mind up about ready to wear clothing. And he realizes young people could do this. And so if I start telling young people, they'll be more open minded and

they'll buy this clothing. The problem was. That any young person not in a uniform was seen as a delinquent.

So most of the young men of postwar Japan were STILL mostly wearing black, heavy, high collared Gakuran. And if you were a rich kid who was feeling rebellious, your gakuran could have holes and wear and tear in it. But again, this was still mostly it. There were a few tiny little short lived postwar fashion trends, but again, they were not widely spread.

Masafumi[00:27:05] only practiced by a very sort of limited group of people.

For example there was a tiny movement of Japanese youth who would wear aloha shirts and sun glasses.

Masafumi [00:28:08] it's called Sun Tribe in the 1950s, but it was quite limited because back then you couldn't really get like. You know, Hawaiian shirt in Japan, which is quite a rarity and many people couldn't get it.

But it wasn't only that American clothes were hard to get. No one really wanted to get behind these American clothes or promote them. Because after the occupation, Americans were generally seen as bad influences.

Marx [00:24:32] there was just a general sense that, okay, Suddenly all these Americans show up. All of the morals of the country were tied to the imperial system that's just being dismantled. And so there's a sense, like youth are going to go wayward and be immoral and the whole country is going to go to hell. And there's all these crimes involving young people that seem to be proving the point. And one of them was called the Oh, mistake incident.

In the Oh, Mistake incident of 1950- a young Japanese man held up a coworker at knifepoint and stole his car and all his cash, and then the assailant proceeded to take his girlfriend on a joyride for three days.

Marx: [00:25:09] And the first thing they did is they went to Ginza, which was the fancy shopping district of Tokyo, and they just bought the nicest possible clothes that existed. And so they both got dolled up and then they, you know, were shacking up and all these hotels. And on the third day, they got caught finally. And when the cops knocked on the door, he said oh, mistake. And he used English. And so the guy decided the way he would, you know, evade arrest is he would pretend to be a Japanese-American soldier.

Police reported that the perpetrator was dropping random English words into his sentences and he inexplicably had a tattoo on his body that said "george."

Marx: [00:26:00] And this guy is trying to be an American. So, you know, this this kind of Bonnie and Clyde situation, although they didn't kill anybody, but, you know, this these kind of teenage delinquents. They got all this money and the first thing they did was buy clothing. So in their perp walk they looked like hollywood movie stars. And it just proved,

okay, all these youth are going to be Americanized and they're all going to become criminals. And so it was a very big moral panic and worried people quite a bit.

Even though the Japanese government had once encouraged the adoption of foreign styles, basically they wanted groups of people to adopt single uniform looks and stick to them. Over and over, western clothes were curtailed to the point of absolute conformity. And Ishizu was determined to break this pattern.

Marx [00:10:53] So he had this challenge where he needed to create a style for young men in Japan that wasn't their uniforms, but he had no idea what to do because everything the young people wore- they all just looked like gangsters. *[00:11:19]* And so, you know, getting into late fifties, he was trying to figure out how to solve this problem. And he ended up doing a world tour.

Just trying to find any cool look he could import and sell that might win acceptance with the Japanese populous at large. And so he went to France and England and to New York. Although, honestly, he wasn't expecting to find much in America.

Marx: [00:21:23] Ishizu did not like American fashion. He was really into British fashion. He just saw the pinnacle of men's fashion to be British. So he didn't have any particular interest in. Well, I want to dress like an American. He just knew that he was looking for a new market. He needed a product for that new market

And of course, once Ishizu was in the states, he remembered the words of that Ivy-educated American Lieutenant O'brien- the one that he befriended as a prisoner.

Marx: [00:11:41] And so when he was in New York, he said, I should go check out Princeton, because I hear it's great if I remember being told all these great stories about Princeton.

Ishizu shows up on the campus of Princeton in 1959.

Marx: [00:11:48] and he sees what we consider now classic Ivy League style. So, you know, students are wearing blazers, chino pants, oxford button down shirts.

It is so hard to hammer this home- but I am going to say it again- this was so WILDLY casual

MARx: [00:23:50] it's like very difficult to understand, like how casual and radical Ivy League style was.

And the really radical thing that Kensuke notices about these Princeton students. Is that they are practicing a version of that same style he had adopted when he was a kid. When he was proudly wearing his ratty old Gakuran to shambles as a statement. These preppy kids in Princeton had ragged edges on their pants. They have pilling on their sweaters. They have worn holes in the elbows of their jackets.

Masafumi: [00:12:40] And Ishizu saw sort of like a similarity between bankara boys and these college boys in Ivy League universities in America. because they both embodying a certain sense of privilege

Marx:[00:27:24] So I think when he saw these Ivy League students looking a little bit shabby- he understood why they were doing that and he knew it was cool and he could just feel it in his bones a little bit. *So I think him being old money and going to these old money universities, he immediately understood the aesthetic.*

After Kensuke comes back from this visit to Princeton and he is resolved to overhaul his whole brand.

Marx:[00:12:29] So he already had his brand van jacket and he decided, let's start experimenting with selling some of this Ivy League clothing

Masafumi: [00:07:18]*So Ishizu shifted the designs of his company from creating like ordinary men's suits to something that is catering more to young boys and young men. And he sort of turned his designs by using the concept ivy*

So Ishizu had to figure out how to take Ivy, this style that had developed and evolved from this very particular cocktail of factors in the United states, and uproot it. And transplant it. Kensuke Ishizu had to convince the youth of Japan that Ivy - the uniform of the White Anglo Protestant elite- was for everyone.

****doo doo doo doo****

I cant say I was into the preppy look growing up. And neither were my parents - Because it just didnt seem like something for us as Jews. Those clothes, that lifestyle. These were all from the bizarre extended universe of White Anglo Saxon Protestants.

Jason: [01:25:41] I dated a girl whose mother was named Pussy|- her name was like patricia and annd I remember being like 16 and being like, people call her this to her face, like, yeah, of course. She's very important at the country club

I, like GQ contributor Jason Diamond, enjoyed the view of WASP culture that we got from the outside.

Jason Diamond [00:37:06] my family saved notices from other country clubs that literally say, we don't accept your race. Like, they loved that. So they thought it was so funny.

And the preppy style, similarly, I was like- this is some goyishe nonsense. Like- those pink pants with embroidered lobsters all over them? What the fuck is that? But it turns out that- just like White Christmas, and Rudolph the Rednose Reindeer and Silver Bells- is made by Jews

Jason: [00:31:27] The Jews made it. [00:33:24] *We literally make the clothes. I mean, we I mean, we were the people sewing the clothes for years [00:35:07]-we owned all the*

department stores. They're all owned by Jews. They were owned by Jews. I'm feeling like saying this out loud. Sounds very weird.

It does.

I mean its true, but it was starting to sound like some sort of Jewish conspiracy. And I was initially a little worried that this is our role in this story.

Avery: [00:25:00] I can see how it also plays into the stereotype of like the Jewish businessperson. And I wonder how you what you think of that. [00:25:09][9.4]

Talia: [00:25:11] I think you can operate from a defensive crouch, like, what would a fascist think of this?... they're going to think what they they want.

Tal Lavin is the author of Culture Warlords and researcher of far right conspiracy theories.

Tal: [00:27:21] There are historical reasons for this stuff, right? Jews were barred from many, many professions. many of which involved sort of cultivation of land, owning land.

So Jews had to find other things to do. One of those things as you may know, is money lending

So the reason why Jews are so associated with money lending is very specific. There is a prohibition on usury, right? Lending at interest. That Christians adhered to very religiously through the Middle Ages. Jews do have a similar prohibition on usury, but our prohibition does not extend to non-Jews. Right. Christians saw this and they forced them into money lending and tax collecting and these sort of odious positions involving money and then they create the stereotype that the jew is a money grubber.

But one of the other, again, very limited, professions that was open to Jews was tailoring.

Tal: [00:30:45] You have the strong tradition of tailoring in the Jewish community as one of the few non-sort of mercantile or banking professions that we were allowed. Also, you know, yes, we had a vested interest in democratizing the preppy uniform.

[00:36:37] *This is just like, you're not going to accept us, so we're going to just take your culture. Like, like waspy white culture. We're just going to make it for everybody.*

They didn't let jews into the preppy universities, the preppy schools. These were the eras of quotas.

“The Jewish Problem continues to call for the utmost care and tact,” the Yale board of admissions wrote in 1945. Yale had a “limitation of numbers” policy that was in place until 1960. So a jewish immigrant named Jacobi Press didn't actually attend Yale University. But he clothed the kids who did.

Richard: [00:11:01] my grandfather had originally studied to be a rabbi - God forbid, he was the first generation that did not become a rabbi, although he became a rabbi in the clothing- of the clothing business.

Richard Press is the grandson of Jacobi Press.

Richard: [00:03:38], the eponymous name of the founder of J. Press. And grandpa founded J. Press in 1902

J. Press, since 1902, has been a titan of the ivy look. A real flagbearer of this fashion tradition. And honestly, I had never heard of it before. It's really for people who are deep into this world because J. Press doesn't ever show their logo on their clothes- you never see the brand outwardly.

Richard: [01:42:03] The rule the press family was we advertise J Press are not through the logo publicly, but by the quality of the merchandise we're selling.

I immediately felt comfortable with Richard Press because he reminded me of, like, my grandparent's friends. Or perhaps a tertiary recurring seinfeld character. And yet he wears bow ties and sport jackets like his stock had arrived on the Mayflower. And of course it makes me wonder about his grandfather- how a Jewish immigrant from Latvia learned how to dress like a blue blooded WASP

[00:12:15] My grandfather really took upon the social the the conversation and the sophistication of the of the top tier Yale community. And he learned how to he didn't talk with the Groton accent, but he connected immediately with the Skull and bones and the top tier students at Yale and built up a large business. Now, he began the business by going to the dormitory rooms of Yale with his satchel of swatches.

Avery: [00:13:10] So how did he figure out this..., like, waspy style?

Richard: [00:13:17] Okay. Here's what happened. And my grandfather wasn't alone, although I think he carried it to its utmost. But at the turn of the 20th century, there were a raft of tailors. Cause Yale at the time was all male and there were Langrock tailors, Arthur M Rosenberg tailors. And J.Press moved in amongst these tailors. And the tailors cheated because what they did is they adopted the the classic Brooks Brothers number one suit.

The suit that Brooks Brothers pioneered with the soft shoulders.

Richard: [00:33:12] natural shoulders. [00:17:54]

That blue blazer that had become a signature of the ivy look, and all but mandatory for students.

And my father said, look, we got to differentiate ourselves from Brooks Brothers, so how are we going to do it? So he did a quarter inch lap seam on the lapels of all the sport

jackets and suits. I'm wearing a –you can't see it because this is a podcast, but that has a quarter inch lap seam. And I'm going to have to stand up to show Avery.

Avery: [00:18:25] It's got a vent in the back. [00:18:27][2.1]

Richard: [00:18:27] A hook vent, whereas Brooks Brothers, the seams were different and didn't have a hook vent

Avery: [00:18:32] These differences are so small!

Richard: [00:18:34] But they weren't small. To all the mavens who wore Ivy League clothes in those days

The little differences were how you could tell who was an insider. Who shopped where. There were all these rules about what was considered ivy. What was appropriate to get the right look. And it came down to a series of tiny, indiscernible details.

Richard: [00:59:23] At Yale, at Princeton. Clothes were very much a part of the scene. All the Wannabes at Yale and Princeton would gather when the J. Press catalog came out and they would all figure out what changed from the year before. Yes they did! And if you look at the old brochures, they read like an Encyclopedia Britannica of of Ivy League and traditional clothing.

Avery: [01:01:41] Being like this is what you pair with this and-

Richard: exactly

The rules of the style varied spread far and wide across other schools.

outside of the Ivy League, Stanford and I can go through the list.

Basically If fashion is a language, each institution, each region, sort of cobbled together their own dialect of ivy.

Richard: [00:26:22] in the South. They dress beautifully– Schools such as the University of Virginia, which was a great leader and [01:00:42] Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

And so around more places in the united states, more ivy style shops popped up

Patricia: [00:39:18] the collegiate store was an amazing phenomenon. you know, collegiate store on every corner practically.

Patricia Mears, curator of the museum of the Fashion Institute of Technology.

Patricia: [00:39:28] If you went to Sears, there would be a department for Ivy style clothes. If you were in a small town, there would be a store dedicated to men's wear,

very often with a lot of Ivy League style clothes in it. everybody had access to it at this point.

And it's no coincidence that Ivy style opened to more people right at the moment when colleges opened their doors to more students.

Patricia [00:37:21] We saw a completely dynamic, almost seismic shift in America's social world.

After the GI bill of 1944, Ivy style went from being the style of the elite to the style of the middle class.

Richard: [00:30:57] The GI Bill, which enabled so many public school veterans scholarships, and Yale, Princeton, Harvard, Amherst, Dartmouth, as well as the state schools where many people went literally for free, burgeoned!

Patricia: We saw people who now had for the first time, I think it was probably a dream. People never thought they would go to college. And many ivy league schools suddenly had working class people there.

And these new influx of college students who were coming in on the GI Bill were older. They had been to war. They had wives and kids and jobs. Their lives weren't entirely occupied by campus life. And so this influx of veterans brought in new elements to the wardrobe.

[00:48:07] basics like chinos, which never existed in the Ivy vocabulary prior to 1945

Khakis are army surplus pants.

Richard: [00:31:38] the snobs in the Ivy League, loved all of the khaki pants that the GI veterans wore. So the whiffenpoofs

The Whiffenpoofs are a Yale acapella group.

the whiffenpoofs would sing in their j. Press hand sewn sport jacket, but they'd wear it with the \$2.95. Army-Navy store khakis that the veterans wore. So it was a generous, very, very democratic popular mixture that grew throughout the rest of the United States.

So many veterans took advantage of the GI Bill, that there weren't enough schools to meet the demand. So women's schools like Skidmore and Vassar became co-ed for the first time. And so did the style

Richard: [01:36:47] when my wife was at Smith - a lot of her classmates wore the smallest men's button down shirt

At this time there wasn't really ivy style for women. After all, Princeton and Yale would not admit women until 1969. And so when women wanted a button down shirt, they marched right into Brooks Brothers or J.Press, which did not make women's clothes, and just steal from the boys

section. But clearly the demand was high enough that in 1949 even Brooks Brothers introduced a pink button down shirt made for women. And it was a phenomenon. Vogue put it in its August 1949 issue and women mobbed the store. A model wore the pink button on the cover of Life Magazine in August 1949, to illustrate what Life Magazine dubbed “swipes’ from boy’s clothing, a fashion trend.” So I was like wow this all sounds kind of subversive for women to be wearing this stuff! Especially when I imagined how strict the dress codes must have been at women’s colleges in the 50s

Susan: [00:10:04] We had to get – put a skirt on for dinner. and there were people who were just pull skirts on over their bermuda shorts. I will admit that!

Susan was a history major at Wellesley College from 1954 to 1958

Susan: [00:03:10] *The college were still acting in loco parentis.* there were rules--we were terrified of breaking the rules

Like there was this one rule that you could not spend the night in a hotel within five miles of campus. But one night when Susan and her fiance were driving back to campus after thanksgiving, they got stuck in a snowstorm

Susan: [00:48:21] it was snowing and the weather was awful. And he kept saying, we need to stop and spend the night someplace. I said, no, no! I cant! ...

They basically plowed through this dangerous snowstorm to avoid breaking this one silly rule.

Susan: [00:49:17] I was just a very law abiding person, still am basically.

This is all just to say, Ivy Style, it turns out, was not a rebellious rule breaking thing I thought it might have been - because Susan would never break the rules! And yet Susan showed me a picture of her and her friends at Wellesley- all wearing button down collared shirts. and honestly one of her friends is in what must have looked like drag at the time- she’s wearing a button down collared shirt and shorts and sneakers. But in fact, Wellesley condoned this. And arguably were encouraging their lady students to dress this way.

[00:05:24] I have a copy of something called The Gray Book, which was written by the student government... and talked about what to pack.

They recommended students heavy sweater and wool slacks and bermuda shorts

nothing shorter.

They even recommended wearing blue jeans!

[00:25:08] Here we go- one formal dress is generally all you need certainly until Christmas. And it says on campus we like comfort more than constant changes.

You only need one dress. You should prioritize comfort. It just made sense.

[00:17:09] I mean, we. We certainly weren't trying to dress like men. [00:18:27] except to be comfortable. [00:21:45] but it wasn't conscious-- it was just sort of what we did. I don't know. Maybe we didn't spend a lot of time thinking about clothes. [00:24:32] We didn't have time! I mean, you know, college was hard!

There had been glimpses of practical androgyny in the past. When women wore mens clothes for practical reasons during wwII when they were working in factories. I feel like Ivy was the origin of the classic sort of white collar gender-free style that still exists now.. Where everyone can sort of wear a button down shirt and pants. Its just that when I graduated college, I still got to keep this style. Susan graduated back into dresses.

Susan [00:34:49] *Well, it was still the era when when you got out of college, women had to be able to type, you know, to get a job. And and I'm we all railed against that.*

Avery: [00:35:02] *Why?* [00:35:02][0.0]

Susan: [00:35:04] *Well, because men didn't have to type to be able to get a job. And when you had to get the coffee and you were a secretary and that, you know, here you are with a fancy BA degree and and you're making coffee. And men weren't having to do that.*

Men did not have to type and make coffee. But they did have to get back into suits.

Patricia [00:41:38] *when he gets into the working world, He's probably not going to wear his letter sweater in his chinos anymore.*

Richard: [00:55:49] *On the other hand, he didn't want to wear a square shoulder, shiny Broadway style suit. So he went to Brooks Brothers or J.Press or one of the many other Ivy League style stores and would buy a gray flannel suit.*

This is what the streams of commuters coming to work on Madison Avenue were wearing. A soft shouldered gray flannel suit.

It became a uniform and corporate america wanted that.

So white collar men got to incorporate some of the softness and flexibility of Ivy style into their work week. But by and large, after graduation Ivy became the look for after hours

by the time you get into the corporate world, you have a lot more rigidity. [00:44:10] And I think some of the freedom that you had as a college student starts to step away. But it's why your private life was so important. So you were going to wear the go to hell look

That's the pink pants with little embroidered lobsters or martini glasses all over it. The go to hell look is almost clownish.

vibrantly plaid shorts or something like this. That's where the freedom came from.

And so the sportiness that was once such a part of campus life became weekend wear. And vacation wear. And Ivy became synonymous with a certain sporty sort of leisure.

Richard: [00:50:02] If you look at the pictures of the Kennedy family at the family retreat in Hyannis Port, ...they're all wearing Oxford buttoned down shirts, not sport shirts are wearing Oxford button that sure rolled up in the sleeve, usually with khaki trousers.

So this is interesting to me. The time honored adage about trend proliferation is that once everyone has it, it's not cool anymore. Right? That's a bedrock assumption. But this to me is the twist. That as Ivy became the ready-to-wear uniform of the newly expanded middle class, and women— the elite old boys still continued to wear Ivy and they loved it.

Richard: [00:24:08] I mentioned JFK but the leaders of American society and I'm talking about nightclubs in New York, stork club, 21 club, El Morocco, which you probably not too many people know about, but that's where the elite meet to eat and greet and drink. And they all wore remnants of what was their Ivy League wardrobe in all the society pages!

And as Ivy expanded to more and more people, it's like Ivy got cooler and cooler. And it turns out Ivy's coolness- its freedom, its ease, its nonchalance— these elements would be key in outfitting the civil rights movement. After the break.

BREAK—

Avery: [00:00:14] 'm going to start with an impossible question, fully knowing that it's impossible. But um what is cool?

Jason Jules: [00:00:21] I have no idea what cool is. Whatever.

AT: But you are so cool!

Yeah. I think whatever it is, it's something to be avoided.

This is such a cool person thing to say. I don't know a single cool person who calls themselves cool.

Jason Jules: [00:00:35] I have an I have a feeling that if something is seen as cool, then it's temporary. And what's cool one day will become uncool the next. So the idea for me of something being cool is quite a turnoff.

Jason Jules is a writer and editor and creative director and brand consultant- he just has this amazing sense of style that's sort of timeless and yet very unique. And more than a little bit ivy.

[00:08:12] I just love the look is something that I've always loved. I'm a black working class guy from London. I you know, Ivy is something that I stumbled across growing up, you know, I was wearing, quote unquote, these really boring clothes or these old man

clothes. I'd be wearing, loafers with no socks, button down shirt. And, I didn't even know it was Ivy until somebody told me years later, And I think a lot of people might try and make it cool, but what makes it interesting is the fact that it's quite stuffy and quite straight and quite boring, really. So it's almost like the antithesis of Cool.

Jason Jules wrote the book *Black Ivy: A Revolt in Style*. And it starts with the ways that Ivy Style- was adopted by students at Historically Black Colleges like Morehouse and Howard in the mid 20th century.

Jason Jules: [00:14:30] I think that the initial the genesis of Black Ivy was classic Ivy League clothing. And as time moved on and as the kind of practicalities of the style became more evident, so too did the aesthetic change.

And Black Ivy became something different than Ivy. Basically Black Ivy starts to incorporate new elements.

Jason Jules: [00:14:48] So at a certain point within the Black Ivy canon, let's say a wardrobe, they had to be incorporate workwear primarily because, you know, it was a political statement is a political activity.

Jason Jules: [00:15:41]. In the mid 60s there was this campaign to encourage voting registration in the deep south. And a lot of students from the West Coast and the East Coast traveled to places like Mississippi to help with that campaign.

And these students realized was that wearing elite Ivy League clothes really wasn't going to cut it with farmers when it came to encouraging them to go and vote

They ended up having to wear workwear in order to relate to sharecroppers who they wanted to recruit, wanted to help to go and vote.

Black Ivy was about bridging both worlds. The sharecropper and the college student. Wearing an oxford button down *with* denim overalls. Or loafers with jeans. And it was bold for black activists to hold onto ivy and to claim it in this way.

Jason Jules: [00:24:46] I think it's incredibly loaded in the sense that you have to see it from the perspective of the person who's invested in suppressing the black vote, in suppressing black freedom and suppressing black equality within the states. If they come in, if they come from a position that actually black people are second class citizens and should be seen as such, then for a black person to be dressed in these clothes could be seen as quite offensive, almost aggressive. You realize that it is a high risk high stakes game. And those clothes were symbols of that.

I mean you see students organizing sit-ins. Everyone Marching in Selma. They are wearing Ivy. They are dressed to move. And they are dressed to look good. They are dressed to literally be cool. As in cool under pressure and under fire and under scrutiny.

Jason Jules: [00:25:36] recognizing that, you know, the newsreels and news reporters every single night would be covering their marches, covering the protests, the sit ins they read. They realized that, you know, wearing these clothes meant that they were seen in a different way. Or rather seen it in a somehow similar way to the other people who wore these clothes and asked the question, Why am I treated differently? why am I treated less than every other American?

And I know this starts to sound like respectability politics. Like pandering to the white gaze

Jason Jules: [00:19:47] Not that it had nothing to do with white culture, but was sometimes the antithesis of what white culture stood for. You know I don't think John Coltrane was trying to recreate a Broadway musical when he did my favorite things. He was doing something completely different with that. [00:19:25][65.9]

[clip of my favorite things]

At the risk of alienating theater kids, Coletrane's cover of My Favorite Things is an improvement on the original from the sound of music. It's just better. And in the same way. Black Ivy improved Ivy. And a lot of this improvement came from Jazz musicians.

Jason Jules: [00:32:21] jazz musicians like Davis and Coltrane and Sonny Rollins, they were fully aware of, you know, that the tensions that they create by wearing those clothes in the same way they're fully aware of the tensions they create by, taking a Gershwin song and then changing that.

More than anyone, it was Miles Davis who made ivy look so cool. In his Ivy period, he's wearing like an oxford shirt- unbuttoned, sleeves rolled up, thrown on like a college student, but with sunglasses. And on the cover of his live album at Newport in 1958 seersucker suit with shades on. And that is the coolest. That he is sort of rocking these dorky clothes. And they'd always been Miles' style.

[00:34:42] Miles' father, was one of the richest black men in Illinois. He was a dentist. He was a premium pork owner, importing hogs from Europe. You know, the guy was minted. And Miles grew up wearing those clothes. He grew up without any question knowing, you know, the difference between a Brooks Brothers button down shirt and a club collar. He knew those clothes.

And when Miles and Duke Ellington and Coletrane and the modern Jazz quartet started dressing in Black Ivy on tour they spread this look all the way around.

Jason Jules: [00:33:16] they were like, pop stars out now. So they were super incredible influences at the time.

Especially in Europe. And they were in dialogue with other artists who took on Ivy clothes.

[01:08:44] And, you know, the poets like James Baldwin spent a lot of time abroad because there was a level of freedom and the freedom to express themselves that they didn't have in the U.S.. [01:09:13] I mean, in a weird way, it's like they. It's almost like they sold Ivy a--they sold the myth of Ivy to the rest of the world, not the reality. Because the reality, of course, is that it's this super conservative, hallowed thing in these dusty halls and schools, etc.. But what they ambassadored was something completely different.

Avery: [00:21:06] I mean, this book is kind of mind blowing because you cite everyone from James Baldwin to MLK to Miles Davis. And at some point, you know, a critic would ask, isn't this just what people wore in mid-twentieth century America? And to what degree was this just what clothes were.

Jason Jules: [00:21:43] I think to a degree it is what clothes were in the late 1950s throughout the 60s. But I think we forget the level of intentionality that comes into play. You know, if you look at other styles, you know, the Italian style that say Sam Cooke wore or the Muhammad Ali wore, at a certain point you'd recognize that it wasn't the same as the Ivy style. So around that period, there were other looks that were in play. You know, the guys in Motown didn't dress that way. The intention that was given to people who wore those clothes was that they wanted to look white. And I had to question that intention because when I wore those clothes, that was not my intention. And so, what we're taking away is the capacity to choose and to have an intention to communicate something. And that, in a sense, is what style is about. And that's what kind of frustrated me and made me want to write this book that, you know,

Jason Jules: [01:10:30] It's arguable that if it wasn't for the civil rights movement and the jazz musicians and the likes of Sidney Poitier, etc., wearing those clothes, then we wouldn't consider Ivy clothing as an attractive style at all. It will be seen as a stuffy, boring, remote thing. But what they did is they gave it an element of, dare I say it cool from the outside perspective, if you know what I mean.

Jason Jules: [00:31:40]. Sometimes I wonder if cool. Isn't that the perception of the outsider who aspires to this thing but can never actually reach it.

Jason Jules: [01:12:41] You know, for me, I find the word cool, difficult, because I'm often called cool, and it often feels like a way of framing me and limiting my thinking or my my intentionality, which, you know, I mean, it's almost like. Like a black athlete having natural talent, if you know what I mean. And it's something that he hasn't had to work out and hasn't had to fail and hasn't had to make sacrifices for whatever it is. It's like, yeah, he's just, you know, he's an amazing athlete. *you know, you just. You just innately cool, arent you? just like- you're born cool.*

AT: [01:15:43] I'm sorry to be among the choir of people who have called you. Cool.

Jason Jules: [01:13:37] No no it's a normal thing that's what we all do. It's a term we've all grown up with. But. The question is, if you took cool out of the picture, then what would you have left? And if you had if you took that out of the picture, then you'd have something like this. Self-control, this. Awareness, this. determination to navigate your way around the world that you control, even though the rest of the world is out of control. And so to me, that's why I have a difficulty with the idea of cool, because the way we kind of impose on people at the moment is like this innate thing.

Coolness is not innate. It is made from a series of choices. And it is political. Which is part of why Black Ivy was ultimately abandoned when the civil rights movement hit a wall.

Jason Jules: [00:45:20] There is this notion that it's failed and the style became something that was was not attractive anymore.

Jason Jules says the look definitely was out by the end of the 60s

Jason Jules: [00:43:15] after the death of Martin Luther King. The realization that that journey of peaceful protest kind of run its course. And there needed to be a new approach And it wasn't as if the black activists had failed. It was as if the mainstream and white politicians had failed in delivering on their promises. And what emerged was the mindset and the policies of the Black Panther movement. And as a result, the style and the appearance completely changed as well.

You can really see this style transition in the clothing of Tommie Smith and John Carlos, the two black athletes who notoriously raised the black power fists at the 1968 Olympics .

Jason Jules: [00:44:19] So at one point they're wearing three button jackets, you know, blazers, etc.. But another point. They're wearing beaded necklaces and leather jackets and it's those sometimes they're combining the two. So what you have is this kind of period of change that they basically demonstrate, almost live on TV as they're making these protests. [00:45:10][50.6]

These are the seeds of the counterculture that is about to take hold of American youth in the 1960s. And again it wasn't some naturally occurring, innate thing. The fashion industry had a stake in the visual creation of the counterculture. So did the advertising industry. There was a lot of motion behind the scenes to create and sell a new vision of youthful rebellion away from ivy. And it means Ivy is about to go away for a little while.

And yet, ivy will prove powerful enough, appealing enough, marketable enough, to come back again- and come back even stronger. But it was during America's dormant period that Japanese Ivy grew stronger. And Kensuke Ishizu was going to make some drastic moves to get it there.

Articles of Interest is a proud member of radiotopia, from PRX. written, cut, and performed by Avery Trufelman

Kelly Prime edits the scripts and makes them make sense

Ian Coss did mixing mastering and sound design

Jessica Suriano checked all the facts

The logo art is by Helen Tseng with Photo by Matty Lynn Barnes

The theme songs are by Sasami, with a collegiate reinterpretation by the Beelzebubs, the Tufts University acapella group.

Additional music by Ian Coss, me, and Rhae Royal- whose work you can find at rhaedawn.com

Special thanks this episode to: Shirley Martin and Audrey Mardavich, EP of Radiotopia
with gratitude forever to Roman Mars.