

## Chapter 6

Trends are often described with the metaphor of a pendulum. Swinging radically back and forth. Minimalism to maximalism and back. Pastels to bold colors and back to pastels. Preppy to punky and back. One extreme, then the other. And arguably this view of pendulum swinging change is very American.

Marx[00:57:58] You know I think in the West, the ideal for the last few centuries with artistic innovation has been more or less the idea of the avant garde, which is that you need to radically innovate at all times.

W. David Marx, author of *Ametora*.

So whatever the standard is, you should go the complete opposite and destroy every kind of assumption and convention that exists in order to find the truth. And then once that's established, the next group comes along, says, Oh, we have to radically innovate upon that radical innovation.

But in all the years David Marx has lived and studied in Japan, he noticed there's another way to look at innovation. One that's not a reactionary pendulum. That might seem, on its surface, slower and more conservative.

Marx[00:55:27] Yeah. So in Japan, especially around traditional crafts and martial arts, there's an idea of kata, which is a form. And for every kind of school that you join of karate or ikebana or whatever it is, there's a kata, there's a way of doing things and what you're doing as a student. Is learning how to perfectly imitate that kata and that's it.

When I was learning how to do Sumi-e ink painting, I painted one kind of flower. Over and over again. And it wasn't even based off of the real flower, I was copying other paintings masters made, following their form over and over until I got the stroke just right. And it was only then I could start to paint something other than this flower. And David Marx argues that this was what Kensuke Ishizu did for fashion. He took Ivy- this messy carefree, unstudied American style, and he ironed it out into rigid rules and guidelines and the instructions to follow. And he laid out in the magazine *Men's Club*, and in the pages of *Take Ivy*, Ishizu created a form to copy. He made a kata.

[00:57:00] the Ivy League kata.

.He was teaching and entirely new way to have style. He was showing the youth of Japan what to wear.

[00:49:16] What Ivy League style did for Japan, is it introduced a fashionable set of. Ready to wear clothing that was affordable enough for young people to wear and not rebellious enough for parents to freak out anymore.

Ivy style clothes, thanks to Take Ivy and all the publicity campaigns from Ishizu and Van Jacket, were finally acceptable to wear.

[00:49:34] So after 65, parents kind of get used to the idea that their kids are going to be consumers and they're going to be fashionable

In other words, Ivy kicks down the door

[00:43:41] from that point forward, American style, especially this Ivy League style in Japan, just starts having incredible momentum in Japan and it really kicks off basically youth fashion and the entire casual clothing industry.

David Marx says that *new* retailers and designers begin to open- to sell preppy clothes, sure, but also to expand way beyond them.

Marx: [00:49:46] Then it's like, okay, we can also sell Fancy French double breasted suits. We can sell jeans!

Many of these retailers had started by copying the Ivy Kata, and moved on to sell other kinds of styles.

Van Jacket did not make jeans. And so companies started to produce jeans and they saw it as a market opening.

Suddenly, in the 1970s there are multiple trends happening all at the same time in Japan. There are hippies and rockabillys and punks - all these different looks all over—But almost all of these trends were reacting to or against Van Jacket.

Marx[00:54:44] Even some of the trends that you would consider to be anti- Van or anti-ivy league. There's a fifties rock and roll boom. You know, the guy who founded that really wanted to work at Van Jacket and he failed the entrance exam.

An exam!

And so, there's so many times when people have made the style that's not Ivy League style. And it's often because they were denied working at van jacket.

So Van Jacket was this huge genesis point. Everything in Japanese fashion in the 1970s seems to be related to ivy or working against ivy, or incorporating ivy. To the point where the American preppy brands suddenly realize- oh my god- we have this brand new market we never even considered.

**Richard:** [01:22:47] We were the first American menswear retailer that licensed in Japan.

That's Richard Press, grandson of Jacobi Press, the eponymous founder of the ultra preppy brand J. Press. And in 1974 J.Press made a deal with the brand Onward Kashiyama

Richard: What they did is they took J. Press departments in department stores throughout Japan, and it took off!

And I had never heard of J.Press before doing this story. In the States their audience here was always small and niche and somewhat elite. But when Richard Press would go to Japan he would get this hero's welcome.

**Richard:** [01:29:54] I was a Justin Bieber celebrity there.

**Avery:** [01:30:01] like people screaming. [01:30:02][1.5]

**Richard:** [01:30:03] Screaming and a lot of interviews and television. I had a ball there.

And so this synchronicity happens. Where at the same time, on opposite sides of the world, Ivy is coming into style. Preppy is slowly making its way back all throughout the 70s in the 80s and it's forming a conceptual bridge between the US and Japan that had never existed before. As W. David Marx writes in his book *Ametora*. "Preppy ... remains important today as the landmark moment when Japanese culture began to experience global trends in real time."

And so you'd think this would be Van Jacket's moment, right? But almost exactly as Preppy is winding up to its big global crescendo moment, VAN Jacket couldn't really handle it.

[00:51:11] They they overextend themselves. And they had some investors who just wanted them to be gigantic. And so they started selling clothing everywhere and it was all garbage

Van basically started to scramble for more revenue by expanding into every conceivable area. They opened a flower shop called Greenhouse, they opened an Interior goods store called Orange House, they opened a theater called VAN 99 Hall. Revenue was up but, as David Marx put it, the brand was being drained of their cachet.

He writes "The company that teenagers once saved up for years to buy was now sold to suburban mothers in supermarkets looking for a bargain on tube socks." Their warehouses of unsold VAN jacket cloths were marked down on super sale.

Marx: everything started collapsing.

The brand was getting devalued.

And so the brand goes bankrupt.

On April 6th 1978, Kensuke Ishizu announced the company's bankruptcy.

The company Ishizu started in 1951, that he popularized on the streets of Ginza. The company whose image he traveled all the way to America to rehabilitate... it finally went under.

MARX: And it was one of the biggest bankruptcies in postwar Japan.

In 1978 this was the largest bankruptcy ever for an apparel company, and the 5th largest of any Japanese company in the postwar period.

it was a big embarrassment. And Kenzuke Ishizu had to apologize and police followed him home from the press conference thinking he was going to take his own life. I mean, it was really bad.

Ishizu retired from the apparel business. In an interview in 1980 he said “I have absolutely no interest in clothing right now.” But his legacy was continuing to march on without him. Because once VAN jacket was gone, everyone started remembering the company very fondly

MARX: this new generation of young people is like, You know what's cool? Ivy style is cool. Like this brand that just imploded.

The VAN jacket bankruptcy left a huge hole in the ivy market. And sure J Press was around, but only as like, little sections in existing department stores. And so who came in to meet the demand for Ivy Style but Brooks Brothers. In 1979, the year after Van Jacket shuttered, Brooks Brothers opened a flagship store in Tokyo. On the same street as VAN Jacket's old headquarters. This was Brook Brothers' first ever location outside of the US, and within one year, they had 10 thousand steady Japanese customers– who were all elated they could finally buy the authentic clothes from Take Ivy

**Richard:** [01:24:11] Brooks Brothers came in, opened a store, and Ralph Lauren opened a store. ...

This preppy market in Japan- created by Van Jacket and then by Van Jacket's implosion- allowed American brands to expand their businesses out to Asia- which many of them had never considered as a possibility.

And simultaneously The Ivy Kata was expanding. when VAN jacket exploded, it became a supernova. Little bits of VAN spread out all over the Japanese apparel industry. Because after the bankruptcy, about a thousand or so really well-trained people at VAN Jacket went into other Japanese clothing companies. And a company who had someone from VAN Jacket treated them like a god. All those disciples of Ishizu were still working. And into the 1980s wildly new, organic iterations of preppy began to bloom all over Japan- like Yokohama traditional

**Masafumi:** [00:44:20] And then we had Shibuya Casual, which is another sort of like a preppy style,... Sort of like a unisex version of preppy.

Professor Monden specializes in all the varieties of these ivy looks

[00:46:49] Shibuya casual became popular in the late 80s to early 90s And then it sort of turned into French casual, which is more focusing on French items like Lacoste and stuff.

So Ivy forked off and branched out and continued to evolve in Japan. And nothing illustrated this better than when, in May of 1985, a large-scale shop for casual classic clothes opened in Hiroshima. It was called Unique Clothing Warehouse.

Marx[15:00:54:25] *And now its Uniqlo.* But you know, the really interesting thing is the Uniqlo founder, Yanai-san. His father ran a shop that sold Van Jacket. It was an Ivy League shop

Tadashi Yanai, founder of Uniqlo, who at various points has been the richest man in Japan, knew all about Ivy. He had learned from his father, who had learned from the rules of Kensuke Ishizu. From the Ivy Kata.

Marx[01:19:21] I think Ivy League style is way more complicated than people believe it is. At this point it is not a trend, it is a tradition. It is a tradition of American clothing. And it is a tradition of Japanese clothing.

And as Ivy grew and spread in the 80s and 90, *American Ivy* also forked off in new and unpredictable ways. Ways that are still evolving all around us.

\*\*\*\*\*doo doo dooo\*\*\*\*\*

Phew still with me on this ride?! Ok so we left it at this really interesting moment in American fashion in the 1980s. We were at this revolution that no one really talks about: this moment of great refusal where the fashion industry tried to get women into mini skirts and corsets and poofy sleeves and they didn't do it. They didn't want to go there.

Teri: [00:09:07] I mean, it was just a huge slap in the face. And this is the first time for the first time, women actually, you know, had some power. They didn't have to be dictated what to wear. They did have to be fashion victims. They wore what they wanted to wear and they were not going to wear those short skirts. *Because* as women were moving up in the workplace, that's when they started to assert themselves.

This is veteran fashion journalist Teri Agins. She started the fashion beat at the Wall Street Journal in 1989 and is sort of a legend.

Teri: [00:06:06] this is the exciting thing for me covering this was is that I was there, I was in the room where it happened during the era, during it happened when so many things— seismic shift in fashion

So the 80s was when mainstream fashion really started to get quite safe and subdued, trying to pander to practical consumers of all genders. So you'd think this would be Brooks Brother's time to shine.

Teri: [00:57:12] Okay. Brooks Brothers. —Okay, so let's talk about Brooks Brothers. Okay. When I started covering this beat in 1989, I remember at that time they were owned by this English company, Marks and Spencer, which was a department store

Marks and Spencer is a department store chain that is kind of like the British equivalent of Macys? Sort of? But they also sell food? Whatever was just kind of a surprising parent company for Brooks Brothers when they bought it in 1988

Teri: [00:58:10] they paid a lot of money for that brand, I remember.

Kind of a preposterous amount of money. \$750 million dollars. But Brooks Brothers seemed like a solid investment.

*[00:58:24] It had its own niche. Even when Ralph Lauren was doing a lot of the preppy thing, Brooks Brothers still had its niche. And for the traditional conservative shopper or dresser, they weren't going to necessarily go in the Ralph Lauren direction. They figured that Brooks Brothers was great. Brooks Brothers represented value. The clothes were really well-made. Brooks wasn't adding a lot of fashion. And for a lot of men, that was perfect. So they had Brooks Brothers in its lane. But the thing that Marks and Spencer didn't do was, is that it seems like they just stayed stagnant because their attitude was, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. It has a it has an image, it has a following. We just need to keep keep it going.*

Marks and Spencer just sort of thought Brooks Brothers could chug along on its own. So they didn't really nurture it. At the time Teri Agins talked to a lot of die-hard Brooks Brothers consumers who really felt the quality had gone down.

Teri [00:59:28] They liked their Brooks Brothers shirts just the same and they could tell those shirts were not the same, something was different. And Marks and Spencer- Little by little, the clothes just did not measure up.

Alan: [00:01:37] You know, Brooks used to be a place where it was more conservative and safe.

Menswear designer and Ralph Lauren biographer Alan Flusser.

*So if you put on something, you know, you could feel fairly secure that you weren't going to be laughed at*

Brooks Brothers wasn't supposed to be a stylish retailer. The whole point of Brooks was that you were able to resist trends and just wear these high quality clothes forever. And without the quality...

*you weren't protected in any way. You're more protected in Ralph Lauren.*

Avery: [00:02:07] Protected! [00:02:07][0.0]

Alan: [00:02:08] Protected in the sense that the image that you went for, let's say, is an Ivy League image. Okay. You're more likely to come out of it with wearing something with Ralph Lauren than you were in Brooks Brothers.

Alan argues that it was Ralph who saved Ivy- not only because he kept the look alive and sexy and appealing... but he remained committed to high quality while Brooks was losing it.

*Alan: [00:03:16] Ralph is will always be, you know, sometimes more, sometimes less the the conduit, you know, for that kind of look, which among certain gentility is reassuring.*

And while Ralph continued the ivy tradition, he had also been expanding beyond it

*Alan [01:21:26] Most people think of Ralph as, you know, this kind of. Yeah, Ivy League, not too modern old world stuff, but. That's not who he has been for an awful long time.*

Teri: ~~[00:21:49]~~ different collections took him in different areas,

Teri Agins would watch Ralph's world expand at every fashion show and ad campaign. Into Southwestern cowboy, or nantucket sailor, or Colorado skier or rugged hiker

but he was all about Americana and it was a Hollywood Americana.

Jeffrey: [00:29:00] His view of the West is that way. It's it's a romanticized, filmic kind of idea of what the Old West was like.

Designer Jeffrey Banks

you know, it's the kind of thing that people embrace. They love it, you know, because it's it's like a movie.

Ralph Lauren had spent his career perfecting a sort of cosplay.

[00:29:22] when Ralph puts on cowboy gear, he feels like he's a cowboy. When he wears, you know, tweeds, he thinks he's the Duke of Marlborough, you know?

And because he managed to do each of these looks so well, they really felt genuine.

You know, he didn't go to an Ivy League school. You know, he went to City College and he didn't even finish City College. But, you know, when he dressed a particular way, it made him feel like he belonged, you know? And then he put the velvet slippers on with his initials on the front. And, you know, if that made him feel good and that made him look good and feel good and feel like he belonged to that world, what's wrong with that? What's wrong with that?

And if Ralph's world was a movie, Ralph himself was not only the director. He was also the star. Sure a lot of his ads had models. But Teri Agins says the images of Ralph *himself* with his young family were instrumental in giving the brand personality

**Teri:** [01:59:19] Part of the Ralph Lauren lifestyle, which really worked out was Ralph's family, Ralph and Ricky Lauren, his beautiful wife, their three gorgeous kids. We grew up with them. We saw these kids when they were riding on their bicycles. And you see him on the beach and you'd see them on their ranch in Colorado. I mean, Ralph Lauren really did let you inside his world.

And Ralph's world became physically manifested when he took over a massive French renaissance revival mansion in 1983 and converted it into his New York flagship store.

**Avery:** [00:01:49] There's a portrait of the Duke of Windsor on his 12th wedding anniversary

It almost feels like Epcot in there. The decor and all the accessories and even the music changes when you leave the preppy section and enter the safari part or the cowboy wing.

**Avery in store 1:** [00:02:20] this part looks like a Western trading post with statues of buffalo everywhere [00:02:28][8.1]

All these worlds are all different but they are all still Ralph. Like you could take something from the preppy part and mix it with something from the southwestern part and throw on a motorcycle jacket and still feel, as Alan Flusser said.. Protected.

**Alan**[00:51:43] Ralph has taught people about how to put, you know, different kinds of expensive, inexpensive designer, vintage, clothes together, which is how sophisticated people have always dressed.

This is a version of the shabby chic that the Preppy Handbook advocated for. That Take Ivy admired. Clothes that look a little worn in, a little thrown on. That look like they have a history to them. But the flare comes from mixing genres and archetypes.

**Alan** [00:50:59] a tweed jacket with jeans, you know, or and some interesting shirt and tie or whatever. Ralph was always pushing the envelope of taste.

**Teri:** [00:20:18] *And it was just very sumptuous and exciting and people really identify with that.* Everybody identified with it, not just white people. But there was a whole group of young black kids. Who really thought that Ralph Lauren was the ultimate in cool

In the aftermath of the consumer revolution- when designers could no longer dictate trends- it was the consumers- a bunch of kids, really, who helped shake up Ralph's world, and transform Ivy into a version that's arguably way more significant today.

-----BREAK-----

**Dallas:** [00:48:00] Who the hell knows how to play polo? What the hell is polo?[00:49:46] Who's got ponies? Like that if you understand how he freaked that thing. And. It was just perfect. Had he named his line croquet would it be around 50 years later? No.

On any given day, Dallas Penn is usually wearing Ralph Lauren.

Dallas: [01:05:54] There are people that are that are through and through. Polo. Ralph Lauren. Collectors. [01:06:00][6.0]

Avery: [01:06:02] You among them. [01:06:02][0.3]

Dallas: [01:06:02] Me among me amongst them. I am a lo head. I am a lo head.

So Lo Head is a big general category. Anyone can be a lo head, you too can be a lo head, if you like Ralph Lauren and want to collect or appreciate Ralph Lauren clothes. There are lo heads all over the world. But in New York City there were once very specific crews that were under that banner

Dallas: There are lo lifes- now Lo lifes is a collective that was formed from the combination of two collectives. They were actually boosting collectives.

A lot of Dallas' classmates in the 80s would just hop on the subway and go into the ritzy boutiques in Manhattan and steal clothes.

So the United Shoplifters Association and Ralphie's kids, and they were from two parts of Brooklyn, Brownsville and Crown Heights, and they came together to form Lo Lifes.

*I wasn't a good thief. But I have friends that boosted In high school. And my friends that boosted were were very good at it. And so for them, me giving them \$25 for something that cost 50 - that was the deal, you know, and I bought enough from them that they would charge me even less!*

Initially teenage Dallas was more excited about getting good deals on stolen Gucci jackets and exotic foreign designers.

Dallas: [00:33:45] Well I wasn't really- can I tell you something? I wasn't super into Ralph like that back then

Dallas already had some polo stuff- but they had been gifts from his grandma.

Dallas: [00:27:52] Like, okay, I get it. Grandma wants me, you know, with sweaters and slacks and stuff like that. You know, so I wasn't, you know, was at that time that probably wasn't my jam. I was looking for something more sporty with a little more swag, a little more drip. You know, and polo was staid.

But one day in 1986, when Dallas was on the subway, he saw another kid about his age wearing something really spectacular

Dallas: [00:22:12] The first time I encountered- I was transfixed by it. I was I was hypnotized by the by a kid wearing a jacket. [00:22:23][11.0]

Dallas couldn't believe this bright, loud jacket said Ralph Lauren on it.

Dallas: [00:22:36] But all I can say is that this jacket, it was like everything around me was grayscale. But this jacket. ...All I could see was this jacket, and I had to have it. And I ran after him with my friends. We were going to get this guy's jacket.

Avery: [00:23:02] Not take it from him.

Dallas: [00:23:04] Yeah, we're going to take it from him.

Avery: [00:23:05] Really?

Dallas: [00:23:05] We're going to take it. When the E train opened up and we ran after him, he ran up that escalator. He almost ran up the rubber hand rail. and we chased him and he got away. But that was the first time I had ever seen that - oh, this brand just doesn't just make boring stuff. This brand's making things that have juhuz and color and in like, all, you know, all the sound effects are going off. So what I thought was really quiet and boring was, in fact not the case. So it made me look at the stuff my grandma had given me and like, "Oh, wait a minute. This is hot. This is fire."

And Ralph is the brand that stayed with Dallas as he grew up. And not just the sporty colorful stuff, like the really traditional ivy things.

Dallas: [02:32:48] You know, it's funny because as a teenager, I was probably, you know, I love the loud stuff. I love the loud stuff because as a teenager, you're just loud. But as you get more mature, I really fall back on a lot of the prep things because, they're clean, they're symmetrical, they're inviting and they're accessible.

And a lot of Dallas' favorite grails could be right out of Take Ivy. They're like mid century prep.

Dallas: [01:54:36] We'll start with this. [01:54:36][0.5]

Avery: [01:54:37] Oh, that's very preppy. [01:54:38][1.0]

Dallas: [01:54:39] Oh, I mean, this is-

Avery: [01:54:41] You just keep it in the in the plastic. [01:54:43][1.5]

Dallas: [01:54:45] This is how it was being stored, yes.

Dallas: [01:55:01] Beautiful knit, beautiful pullover, V-neck sweater. Hundred percent wool. ...Let's turn it inside out. This is really the proof in a polo Ralph Lauren item. When you turn it inside out, you check the seams. See. How was this built? Oh, this is beautiful.

Each season when Ralph puts out new capsules, Dallas is looking for the items of the highest quality

*Dallas: [00:04:58]. I always, I always- In a capsule, I always look for the heirloom status item. Now, the other things in that capsule may not be on that level, you know, the capsule may have 50 pieces total. 30 that hit stateside. Some that hit the EU some that hit Japan. So I've made a network of people who are, you know, all around the United States and out of the states, also in Europe, in Asia. So that's the real - that's become the real hunt.*

And another part of the hunt is slowly amassing the right garments to complete a certain look. Like that beautiful preppy pullover that Dallas showed me is just one part of this ivy outfit he's working on. And he doesn't have all the parts yet.

*Dallas: [01:56:49] I haven't. I haven't I haven't actually worn the sweater yet. And this fit. What am I waiting for? Probably I need a hat. The hat would have to be burgundy or Navy, because it's going to, it's going to rhyme off of that collar, right here.*

*Avery: [00:10:41] What do you mean, rhyme?*

*Dallas: [00:10:43] Well, I mean, clothing can reference itself with with other pieces. A plaid hit on a hat can reference a plaid collar on a shirt! Or plaid somewhere else. So there's it's about having the items kind of reference and speak to each other and kind of say, hey, yeah, we, you know, we're not from the same season, but we all cousins, we're all family here. That's rhyming for me.*

And that's the particular attraction of Ralph. Because he references his own world and his own past enough times that he's constantly revisiting and reissuing and reworking his own motifs- you can find a lot that rhymes.

*Dallas: [01:47:00] I hold on to Ralph because it. It does change. But but just like the earth flying around the sun, when it comes back around, it's a little different. But it remembers itself. It kind of it has a of thumbprint that repeats itself. its self referential enough where it's like, man, having something from 2022 that connects to something from 1992. That's you know, that's a jam right there. That's the jam. When you put them together and other people see the connection. For a lot of fans, the height of the brand stretches from 87 to 97, roughly. So the things that were released in that period are touch points, because they they cross over into into music. And, you know, for some people, you know, Wu-Tang Video was like their favorite rap video. And inside this Wu-Tang video, Raekwon wore this windbreaker,*

Raekwon wore this really brightly colored sporty Ralph Lauren windbreaker in the video for the Wu-tang song Can It Be All So Simple. The windbreaker says Snow Beach on it- clearly it was supposed to be like a skiing or snowboarding. but Raekwon is wearing it on the street. He's taking that Ralph Lauren fantasy world and grounding it back into reality.

*Dallas: [00:44:48] ...here is someone who is looked at as one of the stars, superstars of hip hop. And he wore this jacket. I mean it's called a Raekwon Snow Beach now*

**Avery:** [00:45:15] *But Ralph doesn't call it. [00:45:16][1.1]*

**Dallas:** [00:45:16] *No, Ralph doesn't call it that. But I mean that's not his job anyway. His job is to make it and people, they do what they do with it.*

If Ralph had updated Ivy. What updated Ralph. Was streetwear.

**Teri:** [00:50:33] *The reason why they call it streetwear is because people saw people on the street wearing it. [00:50:41][7.9]*

*Teri Agins says this style movement had to happen in cities- in places where you could actually see people walking down the street, wearing clothes in their own unique ways*

**Teri:** [00:51:10] *You had to have just ordinary people who were out all the time who would save up all their money to buy like a Ralph Lauren Polo shirt or a sweater or whatever. And then they'd take it and mix it with their jeans, with their cheap jeans that they got Penny's or whatever. And then they kind of then they might turn the collar a different way or or turn a hoodie or tie a sweater around their waist, or they would take it and make it their own look.*

*So I don't want to make it sound like ivy is solely responsible for streetwear. But Ivy really is a significant component of it.*

**Jason Jules:** [01:04:46] *the importance of streetwear and how it's kind of fed into Ivy and the other way around is that it's kept it- Let's say edgy, its kept it fresh. Its kept it young.*

*Jason Jules, author of Black Ivy.*

*what streetwear has done is -is constantly changing. It's constantly youthful but also is constantly aspirational. And that's another element that kind of re-energizes ivy style.*

And streetwear presented an extra aspirational version of ivy that was decidedly different from the kind in the preppy handbook. Because it wasn't stained and torn like an old money college student.

**Dallas:** [02:17:55] *in hip hop style, you want to be fresh. And being fresh is above all, being clean, not having smudges, not having scuffs, not having rips or tears.*

It was the same basics- the same collared shirts. Just worn in a totally new way.

**Dallas:** [01:29:57] *Hip hop was like, hey, we're going to freak this sample. We're going to have you bobbing your head to this song. And we just took a piece of it. You know, we just took a -we just sampled it.*

And Ralph Lauren at first, did not let on that he knew about this new way his clothes were being worn.

**Avery:** [00:26:05] *Do you know if he knew about, like the low heads and the lo lifes?*

**Jeffrey:** [00:26:19] *Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. he definitely knows about that. I didn't know that was the name for for this group, but yeah, absolutely.*

Designer Jeffrey Banks used to work with Ralph Lauren.

Jeffrey: [00:27:31] *He he did what he's always done, which is stuck to his own vision and stuck to his own style. He never pandered the way some other designers who shall remain nameless did.*

Tommy Hilfiger was from upstate New York. From a city called Elmira. He was from a working class background. And had grown up around a lot of different kids around a lot of different races.

Teri: That was also something about this brand. It wasn't like a Benetton where it was just a photo set. It was actually- they had people of color in all different areas of their company. It's just part of the ethos of their company. And the reason it worked is because it was authentic.

Tommy Hilfiger started his company in 1985. And already by 1997, as Teri Agins writes, Hilfiger and Ralph Lauren had a toe-to-toe rivalry.

[00:30:36] *These companies at that Point were almost exactly the same size In sales, which was. Really incredible considering that Ralph Lauren had been around 17 years longer than Tommy Hilfiger. Well how did that happen? Because Tommy Hilfiger came along and came up with another version of Preppy, but his had a streetwear look to it. And he did tap into that hip hop crowd in a big way. And it was just because he had the big logos. Everybody said, why his logo so big? So because it was Tommy was like the Tommy letters were as big as like the E on the eye chart. And the reason why he did this was because in the store, before he had his own department, he was trying to find a way to actually point people to the two or three circular racks of clothes for people to see them in this whole sea of sportswear on the floor. He figured if we put a big logo there, at least it'll be like an arrow that'll point people to that section. So that was part of it. It was it was just a marketing strategy.*

And Tommy Hilfiger had **another** marketing strategy. Which was his brother, Andy Hilfiger

**Teri:** [00:34:02] *And Andy Hilfiger was working in lighting in the music world. And he was always working with the rappers and rock acts and he was giving away free clothes. and not just the t shirt with the name on it, but, you know, some really good jackets and things with cool logos*

And the Hilfigers knew this would pay off – that if you give away enough free stuff to enough cool people, someone someday is going to wear something. And sure enough in 1994 the payoff came.

Helen Hunt: “Snoop Doggy Dogg!”

**Teri:** [00:33:03] Snoop Dogg was on Saturday Night Live and he wore something of Tommy Hilfiger's.

A red and navy striped rugby shirt that said TOMMY in massive letters. Admittedly a very cool shirt.

*that Monday, their phone, like lit up. Everybody was saying, I want to get that from my store. And so then they realized, wow, this connection between music and fashion was really a winning formula. [00:34:41][16.7]*

**Teri:** [00:40:20] *I remember going to fashion shows and we would Tommy always had music at the shows, live music- in fact, that's -Sean Puffy Combs was a model in one of Tommy's fashion shows. Tommy had all these hip hop guys.*

And eventually, when Russel Simmons wanted to start Phat Farm and Sean Combs wanted to start Sean John, they turned to Tommy Hilfiger for mentorship

*And remember at that time, hip hop beginning, hip hop music had not crossed over completely to the mainstream. So...as it was starting to crossover, Tommy was there early. Because the funny thing was, is that a lot of people didn't acknowledge that some of the biggest consumers of hip hop music were white kids. But I would hear people say, oh, you know, that is ghetto and it was foolish to think that black consumers were going to somehow sully the brand. Because mainstream still meant white.*

Although Ralph Lauren did, in the mid 90s, hire a black model to be the face of his brand.

**Teri:** [00:39:30] *Ralph did hire Tyson. Tyson Beckford.*

**Avery:** [00:39:34] *But only after Tommy.*

**Teri:** [00:39:35] *Yeah, but the thing was, is that Tyson Beckford -dark skin, handsome, exotic black man with Ralph Lauren! This was a big deal. And he was in all the ads, not just in the sportswear ads. They had him in suits. And often in a lot of ads he was the only model in the ad. So it wasn't like he was just part of a group. And a lot of black people were really excited. I remember when that happened.*

**Avery:** [00:43:39] *But did this change the way his clothes looked or the way he approached his clientele?*

**Teri:** [00:43:51] *No, it didn't. Back then, no.*

Ralph did not intentionally release anything that was meant to look like Streetwear. In the 90s, Ralph did not acknowledge it.

**Dallas:** [00:51:11] a smart move to not acknowledge it! Again, this is aspirational apparel. All right. This is aspirational apparel. And to be honest with you. You know, no one's really aspiring to be black. Not in the way America would. Would treat you. No not like that.

Avery: [01:00:17] But I mean, it's not like you were trying to look white?

Dallas: [01:00:23] No, no, no. I was trying to look free. And and when I say this, I mean, what it really goes to is someone who has total command of their time and resources. I think. Polo Ralph Lauren has always been made for working-class, poor people to feel a bit of wealth in, to feel a bit of kind of a transference from their current economic state. And what polo speaks to is lifestyle. And the ability to kind of, you know, do shit on your own terms when you want to. Who knows how much we spend on polo. He probably has an idea. He's had to see references to his brand - you know, through music. Had to. I don't believe he ever did not. I think it was a smart business move to not embrace that, because I feel like when when Tommy embraced it? And wrapped themselves around it? It limited them. It made them trendy.

But, that was all back in the 90s.

*Teri: [00:43:51] But I mean, now, when you fast forward to today, I mean, everything is completely different.*

Ralph Lauren now embraces and acknowledges the lo heads in the brand's history. I just bought this retrospective book about the history of the Ralph Lauren polo shirt, and they talk to prominent lo heads in it. And like a little wink, Ralph re-issued the Snow Beach jacket in 2018, which was obviously in demand because of Wu-tang fans.

*Dallas: [00:45:27] Ralph had to acknowledge that when he retro'd and reintroduced the jacket, had to roll it out and have a visit from Raekwon at the store in Prince Street.*

*Avery: [00:53:26] Well, in the battle, I mean, I don't know if it's fair to say it's been the battle between Ralph and Tommy. It seems like Ralph kind of won, right?*

*Teri: [00:53:32] Well, I think they both won. Because I think that people don't see Tommy Hilfiger as much as they used to. So people said, Oh, well, you know, Tommy's out. Well, what happened was, and I actually wrote about this- is that Tommy Hilfiger pulled back and they regrouped and they reconstituted in Europe. The company is based in Amsterdam. And I actually went over to Amsterdam and I found all this Hilfiger product.*

I also was just in Amsterdam recently and I saw so much Tommy everywhere. And their look now is very classic mid century collegiate Ivy.

*They had a different product in Europe. It was more expensive. They reconstituted. So it took it went in another direction.*

Because streetwear is just direction. One version of what Preppy evolved into.

*Dallas: So so prep really kind of smashed that suit paradigm And what Prep did was Prep took the jacket off. So you could wear a shirt tie and a sweater and be professional...Prep pushed us to that.*

Prep pushed us to that. To wanting to be more comfortable all the time. In all contexts. And so it made sense that prep would also, in the 90s, morph into business casual.

Teri: [00:12:12] Business casual started in the early nineties, had a lot to do with Silicon Valley. People started dressing a lot more casually. And when tech became a big deal. I mean, we think of the world's richest man at that time was Bill Gates.

Bill Gates wore... a collared shirt and khakis.

Teri: [00:14:32] *because* a lot of guys initially when they stopped wearing suits, all they did was take off their jackets and they really didn't know what to do. They would wear a polo shirt and khakis, and that became the kind of business casual uniform.

Business casual was that version of after hours leisure ivy. A sort of a milquetoast watered down, waaaaay less fashionable version of what the Kennedys wore on vacation. And into the 90s, khakis and polos became the easy breezy uniform of institutional power.

Teri: [00:13:19] Everyone started dressing more casually and even went to places like IBM, which was known for the the white shirt and the and the button down the button down shirt and the tie. And the really formal business of IBM was really known for that. And IBM went business casual, I think, around 1995. And that was a big surprise that this was really going to be a permanent shift.

In the casual era, prep was revived with a new vigor. Abercrombie and Fitch had revamped in 1992 to become a fratty version of preppy. Vineyard Vines was founded in 1998 to become a country club version preppy. And all the while, Ralph Lauren was growing bigger and more ubiquitous. And all these brands were selling Americana- this vision of care free all natural all American style. Which- oddly enough, Americans were rapidly losing.

In the 90s to early aughts, Americans were becoming so casual, so carefree, that they were forgetting exactly how to dress. They had to re-learn what was appropriate and what worked for their bodies and their lifestyles. And so many Americans would seek out help. From Japan.

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Additional music by Ian Coss, Rhae Royal, and me

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