

## Chapter 5!

Kensuke Ishizu had come back to the United States to film Ivy style. To capture it, and show everyone in Japan what the look was really about. But from the moment his film crew arrived on the Harvard campus in 1965— it was clear something was different.

Marx: the expectation that everyone would be wearing these ivy league suits.

W. David Marx, author of Ametora.

Marx:[00:40:54] And the kids start showing up and they're just wearing, you know, dilapidated flip flops and cut offs ... the most casual version of Ivy League style you can imagine.

The zeitgeist had already changed so drastically by the mid 60s that the classic ivy look was starting to seem like an endangered species.

And they just start melting down because they're like ....we can't find any people that dress the way we thought they would.

Ishizu didn't know it, but only a few months later, the hippie would become fixture on the college campus

Marx: [00:45:27] They showed up on campus in May 1965 and by fall 1965, the Vietnam War protests are really in full swing and you get a lot of jeans. So it's really the last gasp of what we now would understand as traditional Ivy League style. It's just that it's really, really dress down. And so if you looked at Take Ivy, there's not really that many photos of people and ties and blazers. I was actually looking at it today and it's mostly people in, you know, stadium jackets and cutoffs and T-shirts and tight jeans

So similarly to how Men's Club sort of like... kind of fudged the street style photography to make it look like Ivy was popular in Japan.... Ishizu kind of... filmed whatever Ivy-ness was left on American college campuses in 1965. And there was a little bit left!

Marx [00:47:26] I think they rolled with it when they were there. So they just tried to find as many people as possible that looked the way that they wanted them to look. And then they filmed what the reality was. There was kind of a big debate about, could we even use this? Because like, they don't really dress the way we want.

[mux in]

Marx [00:41:37] But over time, they start getting some good photos and some good footage. They go to Dartmouth and they go to Brown, they go to Columbia, and they go to New York for a couple of days and shoot that as well.

They get some footage of the storefront at Brooks Brothers, a couple of Ivy graduates in their gray flannel suits. You know, they sort of cobble it together. They take some liberties.

Marx [00:46:05] But in the film, there are some scenes that are kind of semi dramatic where it's like a kid drops all of his books on the way to class and then he goes into class. And the teachers, like, are like, err don't be late for my class and there's like a party. I don't know, it, it, it's a little cheesy.

[mux out]

So they edit their film, their montage of moments from American college and post collegiate life.

Marx [00:42:15] And they edit the video and they're like, Yeah, it'd be maybe be nice to make a photo book of this as well.

You know, just as an accessory, just a little companion book to have.

And as they're putting it together, they thought a very clever title would be Take Ivy, and it was a pun on Dave Brubeck's take five.

Which is totally like, the vibe of midcentury Ivy- Take Five was indeed recorded back in 1959- when Ishizu first encountered the Ivy look and went on to become highest selling jazz single ever. So people in Japan would know that the title Take Ivy was wordplay

[00:42:15] That makes way more sense in Japanese than it does in English, but it's somewhat similar in Japanese. So they call it Take Ivy, and they take the video around to all the retailers that sell Van jacket

**Masafumi:** [00:33:12] Take Ivy was produced as one of the marketing tools by Van Jacket.

Professor Masafumi Monden of the university of Sydney.

and they would use the book and the film to promote van jacket items throughout Japan.

Marx: but more importantly, they took it back to the police

If you recall- the biggest barrier to this style was that kids who dared to wear Ivy in Japan kept getting arrested and harassed by the police who thought they were dressing like American riff raff. And so in the summer of 1965, Ishizu put together a film screening at the Tsukiji Police Station and showed Take Ivy to a couple dozen grizzled and graying cops.

the police saw the video and they're like, This is great. Okay, we get it now.

Unbelievably, this totally worked. This film was all it took. The top officer turned to Ishizu after the screening and said "hey this Ivy thing in the US isn't so bad"

[00:43:33] so this film basically helped them overcome their branding image. And from that point forward, American style, especially this Ivy League style in Japan, just starts having incredible momentum

But it was not because Americans were so great and cool.

Marx[01:16:51] it had nothing to do with We love Americans and want to just like Americans. [01:16:09]. It's that the people who have access to this thing, to these rare styles, and they are rare because no one's dressing like an American. So I wanted just like an American. What makes that cool? Is that no one has access to it.

Ivy was rare and elite, and expensive. And so kids were suddenly scrambling to get whatever they can afford from Van Jacket.

**Masafumi:** [00:53:16] In 1960s the company was much smaller so it has a sense of privilege attached to owning van jacket items because they could be a little bit on the expensive side but it was very popular.

Students would show off Van Jacket ashtrays and key chains.

*Masafumi* [00:58:00] it was really cool for a group of young people to use like a paper bag from van jacket and like walking around urban areas.

Van Jacket helped contemporary fashion finally shed its stigma in Japan. And Ivy style introduced all these completely new clothes.

*Masafumi*[00:30:34] Sweatshirt, for example, which didn't exist in Japan before. Or like sneakers. So these items are introduced to Japan as a cool, casual, everyday wear. So Ivy actually provided like a first fashion culture and fashion items for many young men in Japan.

And you know. The funny thing that happens. In every movie, from All About Eve to A Star is Born. Is that the new comer, starts by copying. And then they slowly beat the teacher at their own game.

[00:52:47] So the Japanese at this point are so good at understanding American style. They understand it better, and they're making manuals based on the style faster than Americans are.

Japan was two steps ahead of America's great preppy renaissance. When Americans would start to make manuals based on ivy style and try to figure out exactly how to dress this way. And one guide in particular would extend beyond oxford shirts and brooks brothers to reveal *all* the secrets of the ivy league elites- until every American had the right to claim preppy identity as their own.

\*\*\*doo doo doo doo\*\*\*

In the years leading up to the 1980, American fashion culture was moving steadily, inexorably towards a massive ivy-inspired preppy boom. 1980 would be *the* year. But the preppy vibe shift had been slowly slowly building since the early 1970s.

**Jeffrey:** [01:06:24] I remember going to Europe, my first trip to Europe and all my friends said, Oh, you're going to Europe. You have to bring back a lacoste shirt

Menswear designer Jeffrey Banks will attest that it used to be impossible to find a knit collared tennis shirt in the united states. In Europe, these had been around since 1926, when French tennis player Jean René Lacoste decided to stop playing tennis in long sweaty dress shirts, like all the other tennis players did, and he took up designing his own knitwear. Lacoste shirts were, again, very rare in the states, and often used for actual tennis playing. Until Ralph Lauren made his version of the shirt

**Jeffrey:** [01:07:49] Around 72, 73, Ralph came out with his shirt

The Ralph Lauren *polo shirt* took off almost immediately

And of course the big hallmark of his shirt was the plethora of colors. You know it went very quickly from maybe 12 colors to like 36, 40 colors. Of course, now God knows how many colors there are.

Ralph didn't only *popularize* this style. He made it a part of the preppy cannon. Part of the new preppy aesthetic that would be different from "ivy"

[01:07:23] And of course, the big thing in the mid seventies was popping the collar up. That was a real preppy thing that you only saw Real Prepsters do

*So real prepsters* - as in people who went to preparatory high school- they have called themselves preppy for a long time, at least since the 1930s— but only real preppies knew what preppiness was because that world was just so elite. Like, how could anyone outside of this world even know that there *are* these fancy high schools that are usually boarding schools and look like tiny colleges? And yet. The word preppy came into *widespread* use around 1970.

*"Use your own library preppy"*

And the word preppy was popularized, according to Dr. Lorynn Davita, because it featured prominently in a book and a movie from 1970 called Love Story.

**Lorynn:** [01:06:26] And in the movie Love Story, the beautiful and tragic Ali MacGraw, as Jenny was in love Ryan O'Neal

"Please watch your profanity preppy. "

*and she would tease him repeatedly by calling him preppy.*

"Hey what makes you so sure I went to prep school? You look stupid and rich."

Truly, it beats me why this movie was so incredibly popular. It's kind of schmaltzy? But it was a colossal hit. I mean to give you an idea of the scope of its success:

*It was an incredibly popular movie that gave rise to one of my most favorite non apparel trends, and that is the popularity of the name Jenny. I had multiple Jenny's in every single class I was in.*

So this movie launched the word preppy like it launched the name jenny.

*But it also. Helped romanticize that New England collegiate style*

Love story was one of the earliest in a cavalcade of ivy- infused movies and media in the 1970s.

Rick: [00:20:00] There were a lot of movies in the 70s that celebrated the period right before the Kennedy assassination.

Historian Rick Perlstein says throughout the 70s, there's this wave of movies that all take place in the recent past

Well the Kennedy assassination was 1963. You know, you have happy days and Grease and in American Graffiti and The Exorcist, you know, at the end of The Exorcist, you know, the girl who's possessed by a demon and the demon kind of symbolizing what happens to your daughters under the reign of the hippies. At the end, she's dressed just like Jackie O, right? So this idea that there had been this, you know, Camelot. There had been this peaceful ideal before everything went crazy. That was part of what preppy clothing was all about.

Another huge movie in this cannon was The Great Gatsby, which came out in 1974.

~~Lorynn:~~ *And the designer Ralph Lauren did all of the men's clothing for that.*

In this scene, Tom Buchanan is literally on horseback playing polo! Wearing Ralph Lauren's stuff!

Lorynn: That really helped make this whole anachronistic look become popular.

**Alan:** [00:09:00] that was Ralph's breakout movie. Put him on the map. Very, very important for him.

Menswear designer and Ralph Lauren biographer Alan Flusser.

Alan: I mean, it was perfect –Ralph was doing Gatsby looking clothes to begin with. So it wasn't it wasn't a stretch, but it's, you know, one of the better clothed male dominated movies. There's still stuff in that that people would wear today.

Ralph, finally was in the movies. And he continued to lean into his version of cinematic americana. And he made advertisements that looked like film stills. His photo spreads captured

his world mid action: they showed a group of beautiful well groomed teenagers in white tennis clothes leaning against a white sports car. A couple on a ski vacation in matching fair isles sweaters, mid-laugh. A beautiful blond mother in pearl earrings holding her beautiful blond daughters.

**Alan:** [01:11:40] no one has put more imagery. I mean, when he did those those double page ads in the seventies in The New York Times of these images of wasp aristocracy wearing the clothes and reinforce that as a as an ideal

These ads were a celebration of establishment. They were celebrations of wealth. And that's what consumers wanted.

**Bruce:** [00:31:55] *people more and more want to study business.*

Bruce J Schulman is a professor of history at Boston University and author of The Seventies.

**Bruce:** [00:31:37] The changing economic conditions of the 1970s and the celebration of the market and the entrepreneur as the the way to change the world. All of those things helped create demand among young people to study business.

The economics of the 1970s got so deeply weird that the rulebook functionally had to be thrown out the window. Because rules used to be so clear: when the economy was in recession and unemployment was high, inflation was supposed to be low. When inflation was high it usually meant the economy was overheating and so employment would be good and there would be economic growth. But inexplicably there was inflation and stagnation at the same time.

**Bruce:** [00:24:25] The phenomenon that was then dubbed stagflation and seemed like it didn't fit any economic models. It wasn't supposed to happen that way. [00:24:34][9.0]

There were no rules to play by anymore. Your money wasn't even safe in the bank.

**Bruce:** [00:27:23] if you kept your money in a savings account at 5% when inflation was 10%, you were actually losing money

The stagflation of the 1970s prompted a massive change in how Americans relate to their money. This was the decade that America went from a nation of Savers to a nation of investors.

**Bruce:** [00:28:41] So Chuck Schwab would be a key figure here.

The middle class now had a whole new way of thinking about their wealth after Ned Johnson took over Fidelity Investments in 1972

They created the money market mutual fund, Fidelity Investments Mutual Fund Company.

With a money market mutual fund, it was easy to put money into the market and take money out. Investing was suddenly easy and it was for everyone.

They started to direct market stocks and mutual funds. Through advertising.

In the newspapers and TV, you'd see ads for one 800 numbers that you could call to make direct investments yourself.

**Bruce:** [00:29:00] Before that, you did everything through your broker. And if you weren't the sort of wealthy, connected country club sort who had a broker, then you're probably not participating in the stock or bond markets.

So this was totally new. The world that used to be behind the wall of the country club, behind the ivory tower, was now at your disposal. You could plunge right into the market. And why wouldn't you, if you stood to risk *losing* money in your bank account! Everyone could succeed in business. College business courses were oversubscribed.

**Bruce:** [00:32:15] And that was no accident. That was a concerted effort by business conservatives who thought that that they had lost the war for the hearts and minds of young Americans

There was a fear that after the 1960s college campuses had become too anticapitalist, and so companies donated to new departments that would promote entrepreneurship

**Bruce:** [00:33:21] And so they began to fund and develop business programs on campuses across the United States, as well as setting up dozens of new business oriented colleges.

And so there was this new message on campuses- especially after the disillusionment with the protests of the 1960s— that the social activist wasn't the one to save America. It was the upstart entrepreneur who could really make a difference.

**Bruce:** [00:09:33] *You get the development of what we might call countercultural capitalism. Think of figures like the ice cream makers, Ben and Jerry, like the founders of Apple Computer.*

Women start getting in on the action as well, after the great strides made by the women's lib movement.

**Bruce:** [00:35:47] Not only for the first time, do we have the majority of American women working outside the home, but really, for the first time, we see significant numbers of women pursuing careers, So between 1970 and 1985, the professions really opened to women and there's dramatic growth.

And so everyone is starting to dress for business. In 1977, John T Molloy author of dress for success published a companion book for women, where he suggested that working women adopt a very sensible wardrobe using the same principles as men.

Lorynn: [00:46:09] Neutrals separates, basics, things that can be worn in multiple combinations,

Baylor Professor Lorynn Divita again.

**Lorynn:** [00:49:31] basically trying to advocate a wardrobe that emphasized utility and value and function for the workplace because we were getting more and more women in the workplace. And dual income households for the first time.

And there was this idea that, by sheer force of will, anyone could be preppy. Not just wear the clothes, but like live the full moneyed lifestyle.

**Bruce:** [00:17:35] preppydom is no longer a matter of birth and connection, but is somehow .... associated with less with inherited wealth, with family, with background, with WASPy ness, and being in the country for a long time and more with meritocracy and entrepreneurship.

And there was a slender little book that could give away all the secrets. And show you how to talk the talk and dress the dress.

Avery [00:13:02] Can you describe what we're looking at?

Peter [00:13:08] [00:13:08] we're looking at a paperback book from 1980, describing all the aspects of a prep's lifestyle

Peter, my friend who was the menswear buyer for that big brand that I can't name, and the one who initially showed me Take Ivy- also has a copy of The Preppy Handbook.

Peter: where he or she might go to school, the kinds of things he or she wears.

And so in some ways The Preppy Handbook reminds me of Take Ivy. It has all these rules about how to behave and what to wear.

Avery [00:15:29] There's a list of brands and it's like one weejuns, two beans rubber moccasins, three Brooks Brothers loafers

It's like THESE ARE THE SHOES YOU MUST WEAR. The rules are sort of rigid.

**Peter:** what do do and dont for an interview at a prep school.

But the biggest difference between Take Ivy and the preppy handbook. Is that no American would admit to slavishly following a rigid set of pre-made rules. So The Preppy Handbook is all, ostensibly, a joke.

**Avery:** [00:05:53] why do you think you needed to couch it in humor? All the rules.

**Lisa:** [00:06:00] Because what we were writing about was a code that had never been broken in public. So in order to get away with that, I think it had to be funny.  
[00:06:17][16.8]

**Avery:** [00:26:02] Was anyone ever cross at you for sort of unleashing all these secrets?

**Lisa:** [00:26:06] Oh, yes. but it often came in the in the flavor of anti-Semitism. How dare she? What does she know? You know, Goldberg, Bernbach, whatever her name is.

Lisa Birnbach is another jewish New Yorker. Like Ralph Lauren. Like Richard Press. Like me! And Lisa did go to prep school. And then she went to an ivy league school.

**Lisa:** [00:04:07] Brown, which is the least preppy Ivy League school.

But when Lisa first heard the word Preppy in the movie Love Story

*Lisa:* [00:13:30] Don't you have your own library preppy? Which I think is the quote.

Lisa identified with the stereotype and she got a kick out of it. Kind of in the same way I used to laugh about being a hipster.

[00:14:12] preppy culture was something that glued my friends and me together. But we all thought it was funny. We thought it was really funny.

But it was not Lisa's idea to write a whole book about preppies.

Lisa: [00:10:32] It was such a it's such a confusing accident.

In 1980 Lisa Birnbach was working at the village voice. But she had an idea for a book

I, I had a meeting at Workman Publishing in 1980 to pitch a book, a different book about light bulb jokes.

You know like, how many podcasters does it take to screw in a lightbulb? One, but to understand that, first we have to go back in time. Those kind of jokes.

Lisa: [00:14:43] Workman publishing, they published very, very quick or relatively quick light gift books, mostly. Not to diminish them!

But an editor Workman Publishing pulled Lisa aside and was basically like thank god you're here. They had wanted to publish a book called the preppy catalog but they needed a writer. The fact that Lisa showed up in their office was kismet.

Lisa: [00:11:22] Somebody even used that word- its kismet because they had approached about 30 other writers who turned them down. So if they were going to do a book on preppies, they needed an author, they needed a bio for the author, and they needed all that information to go to press. And they were going to press within a couple of days.

So they sort of tossed this off to her. It wasn't very high stakes for Workman Publishing.

Lisa: [00:13:06] I mean, it was \$7,000 that they were committing to it.

And they gave Lisa ten weeks to write the book. To find a photographer, an illustrator to recruit people to pose, to find the clothes they would wear.

Lisa: [00:20:22] It was a real hustle. It was more writing, more responsibility, more everything than I'd ever done in my life. Even the \$7,000, that was more money than I'd ever seen at one time. I was terrified. And I took it very, very seriously.

Lisa and her co-authors felt a sense of duty. The four of them would have rigorous debates about what to put in the book.

Lisa: [00:23:36] "do you think we need to put the tretorn sneaker in there?" "oh yes. Thats vital" You know, we got very serious about these things because we felt we had a responsibility to be truthful.

They imagined that their readers were about to be intimately familiar with this world, and would be able to call them out on mistakes

[01:31:34] We were trying to make the 7000 people who read this book, who went to Loomis, Chaffee, Exeter, Andover, St Paul's, etc., to give them something to laugh about. and that you could take to the bank and say, this is all true. This is all real, even if it's written to be amusing. There was. There's nothing that we really made up. It was gathering more than inventing. [00:24:25][19.6]

Lisa did most of her research over the phone— calling libraries and her informal network of friends all around the country. And she found that a lot of the preppy attitude towards clothing was *similar* to Ivy.

**Lisa:** [01:24:17] There's modesty, for one. You don't announce how much you're spending. You. You wear things till they basically destruct. [01:24:28][11.6]

In Ivy style, it was a subtle nod that your khaki hems were frayed or your sweater elbows were worn. But *The Preppy Handbook*, pointed all that out and explained it. And the handbook outright says how womenswear is supposed to borrow from the boys

Lisa: [01:43:14] there it is!

Avery: Do you mind reading that?

Lisa: Androgyny men and women dress as much alike as possible in clothes for either sex should deny specifics of gender

So in many ways- preppy is the grandchild of Ivy. It has the same DNA- it's still casual and sporty, it's got loafers and collared shirts and chinos and layers of sweaters. Although preppy is much more playful and colorful- a lot more lily Pulitzer sun dresses and go to hell weekend wear. Simultaneously Preppy is *also* a bit more rugged and outdoorsy than traditional ivy- like it has more ll bean elements. But the biggest difference between Ivy and preppy - is that preppy clothes are truly in service of a lifestyle. A certain philosophy of living. And that's different from Ivy.

Lisa: [00:19:21] When you talked about Ivy League in the sixties, seventies, fifties, whatever. I don't think you necessarily extended the edges to politics and music and wealth and travel and sexuality. I think it was just a style of clothing.

And so the Preppy handbook really got into the deep secret undergirding philosophy of preppiness. So you can even *think* like a preppy.

Lisa: [00:53:24] True intellectualism is not preppy. Not at all! So downplaying one's intelligence, being like George W Bush, a gentleman C is much preppier than being a nerdy scholar. Always was. Always will be.

That- again- ostensibly a joke, but really it's quite a profound observation and a useful thing to know. Like my friend Allison did not read the Preppy Handbook, because it has been out of print since 1995, but information like that would have helped her at Princeton

Allison: [02:21:39] It was so hard. You know, I would like study so, so much. I would read all 100 pages of readings and still not have anything to say, like the discussion groups, because I just didn't know how to do that stuff.

Avery: [02:21:51] Huh.

Allison: [02:21:52] And then it took me until, like, junior year to realize, like, oh, what you do is you read the first chapter, you read the last chapter. You Google the author's name, you familiarize yourself the other stuff you've written, and then you come into free stuff and have something interesting to say about like the other shit.

Avery: [02:22:08] You learn how to bullshit?

Allison: [02:22:10] Yeah, a little bit. Yeah.

Lisa: [00:54:37] you know Preppies are are innately charmers and social beings

Avery: [01:03:22] but what is the uniting factor of all preps across, you know, all parts of the United States and maybe the world? [01:03:27][5.3]

Lisa: [01:03:29] Oh, that.

Avery: Oh, that.

Lisa: What is it? It's a desire to look. Like you're at ease. I think that's it more than anything. It's not to look rich. It's not to look. Educated. It's not to look. Smart. It's not to look studied. that that should be the opposite of it. It's to look like your life is easy. You can sort of just slide from one thing to the next, from class to class, from desk to date, to whatever, whatever opportunity presents itself. And and you'll be okay somehow.

So Lisa had done all her preppy research in an exhausting ten week dash.

Lisa: [00:20:16] It was late by two weeks I confess.

Twelve week dash!

Lisa: [00:15:34] remember asking Peter Workman, who owned the company, would I need to reserve some time to help promote the book, And he laughed at me, like tour, you know? And I was so embarrassed. I remember it took courage for me to ask him, and he laughed at me. AndThe book that they were counting on to be the big success that year was called Mouth Sounds How to Make Funny Noises With Your Mouth. The Preppy Handbook was an a last minute addition to their catalog and no one had any idea it would hit a nerve. it just, you know, it ran away.

Avery: [01:32:45] how many copies?

Lisa: [01:32:46] 2.3 million.

-----BREAK-----

I don't want you to think I forgot the promise I made to you. I promised you I would tell you about the American presidents who did *not* wear Brooks Brothers. Because the fun fact was that since Brooks Brother's has been in business, only **two** American presidents have NOT worn their suits. The first president who avoided Brooks Brothers did so *because* he didn't want to look like other presidents. Brooks was too fancy for him.

Rick: [00:02:33] And Jimmy Carter's commercials showed him in flannel shirts

Historian and author Rick Perlstein says *humility* was a hallmark of The Carter Administration, from the moment Jimmy Carter was sworn in, in 1977.

on his inauguration day, he very famously, instead of wearing formal wear, which is what every previous president had done. Wore a normal suit that he had bought off the rack.

Carter sold himself as a humble man of the people. But his approach to restoring turbulent 1970s America really did not go over well.

**Rick:** [00:21:59] So his response to the oil crisis was basically to say, let's let's do more with less.

Carter's message was sacrifice. When gasoline prices shot up Carter forced white house staff to give up their chauffeured limos. Carter tried to sell the presidential yacht. He urged Americans to carpool and to close gas stations on sundays. He was basically like- wellp, times are hard and we all have to buckle up and suffer through it. But the eventual rip roaring success of the Preppy handbook would be proof that Americans were *not* in the mood for austerity. They wanted to shop.

**Lisa:** [00:47:47] *That sweater on page 148- was so popular- we made it so popular that L.L. Bean opened a new factory just to accommodate the preppy garb that we recommended.*

**Patricia:** [00:53:24] *Lisa Birnbach's book was so important. Everybody on college campuses was was reading it.*

Patricia Mears, curator of the Museum at FIT

*And it was hysterical, you know, but it put into your mindset, even though I was not from a preppy background, I didn't go to a prep school. I was like wow this is fabulous. At the same time, I loved what Ralph Lauren was doing. His catalogs were beautiful. My God, they were so romantic..I think it was 1979, 1980, his catalogs were coming out and it just crystallized what was going on.*

Ralph Lauren had already set the fuse. And the preppy handbook lit the match. Just in time for the year 1980

**Patricia** [00:55:21] *I started college in 19 79. And literally every it was the look of the next year. The Ivy look was becoming increasingly important throughout the eighties. By the time I graduated, I think that probably half the kids wore that style.*

Almost everyone I talked to said something similar. That they themselves started wearing pink polos, or they read the preppy handbook, or everyone people around them did

**Patricia:** [00:57:44] *The preppy handbook was the thing that said, here's the way to look. Here's the way for young people to redirect themselves. I think it was just an overall cultural shift. People were turning away from the trouble of the 70s- they wanted a new direction. And it was embodied in somebody like Ronald Reagan. I think he actually was probably as important, if not more so, than something like the preppy handbook.*

In 1980, the year the Preppy Handbook came out, America elected the *other* 20th century president who didn't wear Brooks Brothers.

*"We must act today in order to preserve tomorrow "*

Rick: [00:40:18] don't forget that he was the guy who coined that slogan in 1980, Make America Great Again

Historian Rick Perlstein, author of *Reganland*, says Reagan eschewed Brooks for the opposite reason from Jimmy Carter.

Rick: [00:05:03] Because he was a step above Brooks Brothers.

Regan was a movie star. He had Hollywood tailors. And once again, you can see this change in dress rights at the moment of the inauguration.

*"... that I will faithfully execute the office of president of the United States"*

[00:03:24] Not only does he wear formal wear, but he wears the kind of the right kind of formal wear. He's not going to wear eveningwear because its the afternoon. So he wears something called a strolling suit, And it was just this complete transformation of what kind of symbols that the leader was trying to project to the country. We're back to hierarchy authority, quote unquote, class.

America had elected an aristocratic president. I mean, basically he was like a king. Or he was the closest America would come to a king. Which is a celebrity.

*"Government is the Problem"*

And in this very regal courtly way, Reagan's idea of supply side economics is like- nobless oblige. Like if you make a lot of money, you're a morally worthy person who can be counted on to share it with everyone else. You don't need to enforce that with taxes!

Rick: [00:24:39]And, you know, Ronald Reagan was very explicit that the problem with progressive taxes is it gives money to people who aren't productive. Right. Who don't deserve rewards because they don't have money. And the reason they don't have money is because they're unworthy people. They don't work hard. That money is a kind of a symbol of not just luck, but character. And character is symbolized by dressing properly, by showing, quote unquote, high class. I mean, that word class is very powerful.

Class. This is the accidental subtext of the Preppy handbook. It pulled back the curtain on the world of class signifiers. And it made Americans aware that they were being read and judged by how they tied their tie, or what kind of shoes they had, or whether or not they wore a belt.

Rick: [00:27:08] So suddenly. Everything becomes a visible manifestation of status markers.

Whereas in the 1960s consumers were told to buy products to prove how free and independent and young they were, in the 1980s, the motives changed again.

Rick: [00:27:37] Now it was you know, can we buy this idea of class? That we're sophisticated, that we have moral worth

**Jason:** [01:34:27] *If you go back and read old magazines or if you look at anything from the 1980s when prep was ascending. It's like you see the word privilege in so many advertisements. Like you have the privilege to have this credit card*

Jason Diamond, GQ contributor.

*you deserve this or it's very interesting. Like we were just trying to really buy into this idea that we had culture, like it was more that you had to buy it. you know, maybe that's how it's always been in some way or another, but in the eighties you're just kind of like, Screw it, we're just going to say it. Like, you could buy into this culture. If you have enough money to buy a Rolex, people are going to look at you a different way. If you have enough money to eat here, people are going to look at you a different way. And if you wear certain clothes people are going to look at you a different way.*

And the preppy handbook inspired a bunch of knockoff handbooks-

**Jason:** [00:19:31] the official Jewish-American Princess Handbook.

*Avery: oh my god*

*Jason: So the handbook became a big craze after*

as well as a whole rash of books about class and status.

**Jason:** like this one is kind of funny. It's Paul Fussell's *Class* and it came out around the same time as the preppy handbook.

Paul Fussell writes of all these class signifiers like "*Not smoking at all is very upper-class, but in any way calling attention to one's abstinence drops one to middle-class immediately.*"

**Jason** [01:34:05] *It's a very weird book, but it's I don't consider it correct. But I think he was sort of on to something?*

As Fussell writes "It's a rare American who doesn't secretly want to be upper middle class. ....it's in large part the class depicted in Lisa Birnbach and others' *Official Preppy Handbook*, that significantly popular artifact of 1980. And it is the class celebrated also in the 1970 Ivy-idyllic film *Love Story*." Who wouldn't want to be in a class so free and secure and amusing??

Especially since, now with the handbook, the keys to the kingdom were right there to grab. And there were images of preppyness everywhere

Jason: [00:19:57] ... the ascension of Ralph Lauren kind of becoming, a nationwide brand and him kind of taking these WASPy styles to the masses. And then also, I think another really big part of it at the same time was the popularity of the Brideshead Revisited adaptation, I think came out in 1981.

Brideshead revisited!!! A tv show based on a book by Evelyn Waugh, one of the bright young people! So not only was there American mid century Ivy in the air, simultaneously, there was 1920s English proto-ivy fashion on tv.

Jason: huge hit overseas in Europe. But then when it came to America, it was like, you know, massive. Like the styles in it were like so popular that I think like Bloomingdales did their entire window based off of it and it was a lot of Ralph Lauren stuff.

All together it just made it seem like ivy was the look of all romantic times past across all decades. THE way everyone always dressed before the world got so messy and complicated. So the preppy look had a massive appeal in the 80s.

And yet the funny thing is. That was not really what I think of as the 1980s. When I think of the 80s I think of big hair and bright colors and muscle shirts and crop tops. But the preppy boom was evidence that.... maybe consumers did not want the neon and the hair spray. Maybe they wanted something a little more neutral. A little more serious.

As the French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky has said, modern fashion has had two stages. It was about status and designers until 1960, then it was about looking young and cool. But Lipovetsky also argues that in the 1980s, we entered a third chapter of modern fashion. And it was a revolution much quieter and more subtle than the peacock revolution. Because most consumers didn't realize that it even happened.

**Lorynn**[00:45:07] One thing that we don't talk about is there's this whole event that happened in the eighties

Baylor professor Lorynn Divita again. Basically in the 1980s the fashion industry kept churning out new wild fashion-y looks

Fashion design attempted to push a look called high femininity on the female consumer populace. And sometimes it was called frou frou.

This was very much in reaction to the sort of androgyny that "dress for success" and preppy handbook were advocating for. Frou frou was high high femininity.

**Lorynn** [00:46:55] corsets. Bustiers - very short micro minis and like frou frou skirts

This frou frou look was on all the runways in 1987. A newspaper ad for Bloomingdales screamed "SHORT" in three inch type. Liz Claiborne dropped hundreds of thousands of dollars to shorten skirts that were already in production for the fall.

and women rejected it en masse. rejected it. because it. Was just too extreme.

Women were like. No. Absolutely not. I have a job. I work. I am not going to wear a mini skirt and a corset. Actually Nina Totenberg got on the air at NPR and urged women not to buy into the hype. But they barely needed the urging. Tons of merchandise went unpurchased.

Lorynn: [00:47:05] And really the bottom kind of fell out of the fashion industry briefly

And the financial repercussions were huge

Lorynn: retailers had to take a heavy hit on markdowns.

In the 80s, by and large. Women decided to do what men had done the decade before. Which is- they decided not to care about keeping up with fashion. All consumers seemed to be adopting their own practical subtle uniforms. For their own lives and their own needs. And they could do that. Because the consumer was more affluent than ever before.

**Lorynn [00:49:47]** and with affluence comes power. And with this affluence, we start seeing that designers lose their ability to dictate to their consumers what they should. Be wearing. And instead, people are insisting, No you give me what I want

And this is the era when the trend forecasting industry really grows.

**Lorynn[00:54:14]** Yes the industry grew powerfully in the eighties in an attempt to help retailers minimize their losses

Lifestyle gurus and forecasting companies emerged to tell manufacturers of cars, of technology, of clothing- what the future would be and what consumers would want.

**Lorynn: [00:55:54]** So there is a bit of a chicken and egg aspect to it. Is it popular because it's available everywhere or is it available everywhere because it's going to be popular?

The hallmark of the third phase of modern fashion is that it is full of multiple competing simultaneous looks that are in at the same time. And it leads to a phenomenon known as collective selection.

Lorynn: [00:06:44] And collective selection is when we choose from sets of competing styles, the ones that are most in sync with our tastes. There are a few different sets of trends that are in at any given time, and we embrace the ones that resonate with us and we reject those that don't

And overall this meant that the safest bet for any clothing company was to play it conservative. To design to the most sellable common denominator, and make garments that were neutral, and timeless, and appropriate. And some version of preppy or ivy fit right into that. So much so that in 1983, a company called Popular Merchandise Inc did a preppy rebrand and became J.Crew.

So by the 1980s, in both the United States and Japan- preppy was so palatable, so easy to wear, so common, that both countries settled into this sort of new neutrality- and this was about to be the first time that one single style was “in” in opposite sides of the planet.

But then out of that, both countries were about to generate some the most significant and original style movements of the 20th century. And both of these movements would have their lineage in preppy clothes

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Articles of Interest is a proud member of radiotopia, from PRX.

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

Additional music by me, and Rhae Royal

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