

## REBELS WITH A CAUSE: FAME AND FORTUNE

by Greg Lindsay

### What's happened to cool?

As digital culture absorbs everything in its wake, the traditional tribes of cool are shattering into a zillion pieces. That may be the coolest thing of all.

When Target opened its first store in Brooklyn this summer, its largest in the world, the Midwest's leading purveyor of mainstream cool wisely decided to split the opening party's guest list in three.

The locals, drawn by the one-night-only 10 percent discount, pushed shopping carts piled high with Pampers through the aisles. A posse of celebrities—Isaac Mizrahi (who designs women's wear for Target), Sandra Bernhard, Parker Posey, and some unidentifiable indie film actresses—smiled for the cameras. And then there were the hipsters, drolly commenting on the surreal scene. Attired in ironic t-shirts, retro sneakers, and recycled '80s haircuts, they sipped free beer while wandering dazed through the store, dodging the more determined shoppers on their way to checkout.

The hipsters had been bused over from Manhattan by Paper magazine, a reference guide to New York's downtown culture for 20 years. Target, a Paper advertiser, had requested that the store be desegregated for the night, and Paper obliged, bringing core and kitsch customers together peacefully, if at a distance. The magazine had even persuaded some of its nearest and dearest to trek to the outer borough: everyone from kooky fashion quartet As Four to oddball performance artists Andrew Andrew. Eek the Geek, a tattooed Coney Island relic, didn't have far to travel.

Target's motivation for this odd guest list was clear: having a little downtown buzz attached to your name hasn't hurt anyone for at least 25 years. But what were the artists, the designers, the hipsters doing there? Didn't they move from Iowa to flee this very thing? Did they really need the free booze so badly? When did Manhattan's edgier types start posing for photographs at a Target... in a mall... in Brooklyn? And why were they writing about it so glowingly the next day in their blogs?

Just a generation ago, you would have never caught a punk, a real one, at Target. Back then, when you were cool, when you rejected mainstream culture, you didn't go to the opening of a glorified supermarket—unless you were there to buy safety pins. Punks and Mods and Beats and Teddy Boys—the tribes of hipster life—were the last, classic "deviants," genuine outsiders with their own larger-than-life reputations.

That was when cool's lifecycle was rather less predictable, when bands of outsiders—young, poor, and aesthetically inclined—would challenge the political and social values of the day, without the least concern for validation by the market. Whether through poetry (the Romantics and the Beats) or painting (the Impressionists) or punk (the Sex Pistols), the aim was always the same: epater le bourgeois (shock the bourgeoisie). Those were the days of uniforms (leathers, dreads, and creepers) and icons (Kerouac, the Stooges, Bob Marley). And while the most uncompromising flamed out (Sid Vicious), some eventually were rewarded by the mainstream they'd once rejected. That was the way the avant garde cookie crumbled.

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