

What Does It Mean to Be Deck? Fin? A Hipster Explains

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By Channing Joseph

Robert Lanham documents a fascinating new subculture in his upcoming guide to being "deck" (once known as "cool"): *The Hipster Handbook* (Anchor, \$9.95).

Though some critics have compared the book to Lisa Birnbach's out-of-print '80s classic *The Official Preppy Handbook* (Workman, \$22.98), Lanham's hilarious romp through enigmatic Hipster subculture appeals to a completely different audience. Unlike preppies, who obsess over getting into the right Ivy-league university and use the word "summer" as a verb, hipsters "frequently use the term 'post-modern'... and often graduate from liberal arts colleges "where the football team hasn't won a game since the Reagan administration."

According to Lanham, if you "have kissed someone of the same gender and often bring this up in casual conversation...[or, if you] bought your dishes and a checkered tablecloth at a thrift shop to be kitschy and often throw vegetarian dinner parties," you are probably a Hipster. If, on the other hand, you "teach Sunday school," "read novels with raised lettering on their covers," "[or] are a big fan of the suburbs and vinyl siding," you are probably not a Hipster. In this case, you might be able to learn a lot from the *Hipster Handbook*, which covers every aspect of Hipster culture from the "deckest" music and hairdos to magazines and books.

In fact, Lanham's handbook is complete with a glossary of common Hipster terms, perfect for the social tourist interested in infiltrating Hipster culture. For instance, as the author tells us, the Hipster word for such a tourist is "bleeker," as in "Every time I'm in the city, some bleeker asks me for directions." Also, Lanham tells us, terms like "cool" and "lame," once commonly recognized slang expressions for "good" and "bad," are being replaced by the Hipster cognates "deck" and "fin," giving examples of how these terms are used in typical Hipster speech. For instance, a Hipster might say, "Have you seen Micah's new bennie (hat). It looks deck as ef" or "My date with Larry was so fin. He took me to Applebee's and ordered cheese fries as an appetizer."

PW Daily recently spoke with the author about the book.

PWD: Are you a Hipster?

RL: Since I studied and wrote a book about Hipsters, people tend to assume that I must be a Hipster myself. Jane Goodall made a career studying wildlife but nobody mistakes her for a chimpanzee. But of course a true Hipster would never admit to being a Hipster.

PWD: Why is 'the Hipster' important enough to write a book about?

RL: I recently completed a book about white baby boomers who dress like Native Americans and wanted to do another anthropological study. Hipsters are everywhere these days, so a comprehensive study of their culture seemed long overdue. My goal was to define a subculture that refuses to identify itself. I think the question we should really be asking is why was a book entitled *The Leadership Genius of George W. Bush* published.

PWD: How are Hipsters different from (or similar to) other sub-groups of society?

RL: Like all other sub-groups of society, Hipsters have habits, rules and similarities that set them apart from others. Nevertheless, Hipsters strive to be individuals and are in denial about the set of rules to which they conform. All sub-groups take their cue from cultural and/or spiritual leaders. Christians look to Jesus for guidance. Muslims look to Allah. Hipsters have Noam Chomsky and Sarah Vowell.

RL: What gave you the idea for the book?

PWD: I live in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, the Hipster capital of the world, so I knew my material would be endless. Even the water here tastes ironic.

PWD: How did you conduct your research for the book?

RL: I put on a mesh baseball cap and grew a handlebar mustache so I could sit in Hipster coffee shops incognito while I documented what I heard and saw. I also interviewed hip friends and neighbors and took careful notes on their observations and opinions about Hipster culture.

PWD: How much of the book is exaggeration?

RL: None of the book is exaggerated. Absolutely every word should be taken at face value. I did understate the lameness of rap metal, though.

PWD: In the book, you give several scholarly institutions letter grades for their popularity with Hipsters, including Evergreen State and Oberlin College, which both get A's. I am soon to be an alumnus of Oberlin and must say that no one there ever said to me, "I'll polish in my deck flogger" when they really meant, "Hey, I'm going to look great in this jacket." Did you ever make up any of the language you use in the book?

RL: Terms like "deck" (cool) and "frado" (an ugly guy who thinks he's good-looking) are cutting-edge and very new. Take a trip back to Oberlin, and you'll see they are spreading among Hipsters like wildfire.

PWD: What sort of audience is the book intended for? And how old do you imagine them to be?

RL: I wrote this book for suburban housewives. They are my core demographic. But seriously, I think the book will appeal to everyone. You don't have to be a mobster to enjoy a book about the mob.

PWD: Do you think a lot of non-Hipsters will buy it?

RL: I hope so. Otherwise, I'm going to need to pick up some extra hours at Foot Locker to pay the bills.

PWD: Do you have any forecasts for what tomorrow's Hipsters might be like?

RL: Tomorrow's Hipsters will run into semantic problems when it comes to classifying trends that continue coming back into fashion. For instance, today's new punk bands often classify themselves as being post post punk. In the future, bands will say they are punk3. Also, jodhpurs will become fashionable.

PWD: Is it your intention that the book will set the standards followed by future Hipsters?

RL: Hipsters already have habits, preferences, and tastes that are followed universally. For instance, all Hipsters think drinking PBR out of a can is "deck." My intention was to document their unique culture.

PWD: Doubtless, there are people out there who will buy the book and use it as a self-help guide to turn themselves into Hipsters. In light of this, do you think the book is more documenting a cultural phenomenon or creating one?

RL: The cultural phenomenon has already arrived. The Hipster Handbook just helps to define the nuances of the movement. The school board in New Haven, Conn., just approved using The Hipster Handbook as a supplementary textbook, so apparently people are seeing the value of this book as a teaching tool as well.

PWD: How does it make you feel to know that, as you grow older, people will hold you to a higher standard of Hipster-ness because you wrote this book?

RL: Great! Hopefully, it will help me polish with the tassels (Hipster speak for impress the ladies) well into my golden years.

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