

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Capstones

Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism

12-31-2014

HipsteRevolution

Alessandra Malito

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gj_etds/58

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).
Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

[HipsteRevolution](#)

By Alessandra Malito

If you thought New York or Portland were rocking the most hipster neighborhoods, you were wrong. The most hipster city — get ready — is in Iowa.

Despite some of the busiest urban centers being known as hot spots for the trending subculture, it seems as though under-the-radar areas have the most hipster neighbors after all. Ames, Iowa, for example, home of George Washington Carver, ranked first on the list.

Following close behind were Corvallis, Oregon; Ithaca, New York and Ann Arbor, Michigan. Not totally unthinkable, but certainly not blaring any hipster alarm like Williamsburg or the Bay Area may have.

Yes, these may seem like surprises, but take into account that hipsters aren't just those plaid-wearing rich kids who use outdated forms of technology like the record player and the Polaroid camera. According to experts, hipsters can be defined by much more realistic boundaries, including being adults between the ages of 18 and 34 years old who have a Bachelor's degree or higher and move to and rent in metropolitan areas to pursue their creative careers.

Richard Florida, an urban scientist, often refers to his work on the [Creative Class](#), which includes occupations such as computer and math; architecture and engineering; life, physical and social sciences; education, training and library; and arts, design, entertainment, sports and media, and how those with these careers are the pathway to metropolitan areas' futures or demises. With the use of the Census' 5-Year American Community Survey and the BLS Occupational Employment Statistics, [this reporter has sifted through and slimmed down the data](#) to find where the real hipsters may reside. Because regardless bias or perception, the hipster is part of an ever-present subculture rapidly taking over metropolitan areas.

It is an old word with a deep history, and those who follow it — consciously or subconsciously — are bringing the subculture to the forefront of urban life, and impacting every aspect from social to economic through the increase of housing prices, the introduction of big-name brands in otherwise small neighborhoods and the pushing out of residents who had been there long before the new kids on the block, but won't be there after.

“When you bring an educated population into a lower income community that may have had a distinct culture, you often get changes,” Derek S. Hyra, associate professor of urban affairs and planning at Virginia Tech, said. “Hipsters tend to like particular amenities, they love coffee shops, they love music venues. These are the things hipsters gravitate towards or where they move, these types of businesses come in to cater to hipsters.”

The hipster is here to stay. So who are they — and where?

Wells Addington, a professor who teaches hipster studies at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland [ranked 228 on the list], doesn't see many hipsters on his campus. He says it's because the students have to wear uniforms.

“There's a more aesthetic mind than most” for the hipster, Addington said. “A Northface is a functional thing to keep yourself warm. But a hipster won't be caught dead in a Northface jacket because it's not interesting and there's no thoughtful process. There's a kind of awareness that comes with that. You're actually cultivating a style.”

Of course a city doesn't have to have college campuses in it to attribute for its hipster composition — and in fact, where students go for college may be where they end up starting a new life. But at Iowa State College, located in Ames, people have seen the emerging subculture of hipsters in their area for years. They

refer to the hipster trends as a “cool” vibe. And when it comes to style, they ask questions like stripes or flannel? Or how tight are your pants? In a 2011 Spring edition of the campus’ magazine, they warn students — [You may be a hipster if...](#)

“I’m fine with the term. I don’t see any reason to get offended,” one student said in the magazine. “A lot of people I know that I would classify as hipsters don’t like the term but I think it’s better to be self-aware rather than in denial.”

There’s many who would say that there is a fully negative connotation to that word, though. Like in Oregon, where the question was begged in a 2014 Daily Beast story — [why Oregon, hipsters?](#) The author attributed it to the influx of people moving to the Beaver State.

San Jose, a well-known area for high-tech jobs, ranked 23 on the list. Boston was 10 spots below at 33. Portland, to compare, was 67 on the list and New York, though used to being on top for everything, was at 134. There are 395 spots in total.

Even Alaska made it to the top 100 — twice. In 2012, [Alaska Dispatch News](#) wrote that Travel + Leisure had put Anchorage as #27 for their own list as ‘best places’ for hipsters. Perhaps it’s a sign then that shows featuring Alaska are making it to mainstream media. TLC has a new reality show about Alaskan women looking for love.

Meanwhile, many of Florida’s metropolitan areas seem to be lacking hipsters the most. Orlando was ranked 180 on the list — most others were even farther down. The last five cities of the index were Florida. Orlando Hipsters, a group on Facebook run by an anonymous user who posts events geared toward hipsters, is focused on keeping a community of hipsters together in an area you may otherwise find none.

According to its founder, rural areas don’t do well for hipsters — small beach areas in particular are not popular among the subculture. A venue for music and local produce markets does help, though.

Corvallis, the metropolitan area with the second highest-ranked hipster composition, had a related thread online where someone posted [a picture of a “Corvallis hipster”](#) on a typewriter. The comments to follow showed distaste for the image and sparked a conversation of Oregon cities and their stereotypes.

Many on social media do, too.

“I think the word hipster has become an insult to the point that nobody wants to identify themselves as one,” Karlie Hustle, an entrepreneur who recently moved to Brooklyn, said. “Many folks are in clear denial of their own hipster tendencies. Me, for example. I sell wooden bow ties for a living — that in and of itself screams hipster. It’s pretty clear that I possess some of the gene, but I do my best not to be a **** about it.”

Articles in mainstream media, Twitter users and books highlighting the 100 or so styles of the hipster put the spotlight on the apparent ease in pointing out and ridiculing the hipster. The subculture, though once meant to be underground, has been catapulted in the spotlight for years, and people aren’t having any of it, ready to call it so much as a [culture war](#).

“I think there’s a willingness to judge them at a distance without engaging with any actual hipsters and seeing what they’re about,” John Leland, a reporter at the New York Times and author of “Hip: A History” said. “People think they’re some other kind of being and I can make judgments about them in a way that might be unacceptable to do with another type of people.”

THE BENEFITS

It turns out, according to Florida and others, hipsters have the potential to play an integral role in the growth of a city. According to an October 2014 report by City Observatory, called “The Young and the Restless and the Nation’s Cities,” talented young adults, who can also be found in the creative class “are playing a key role in driving urban revitalization.” And, parallel to this reporter’s own hipster index, this report states that “young, well-educated adults are the most mobile Americans. Despite a decades-long, nationwide decline in moving by Americans, one million college educated 25 to 34 year olds move across state lines each year.” This defines a city since decisions to move decline dramatically with age and people are often found to stay in the cities they moved to in their 20s and 30s.

“Hipsters are another word for poor liberal arts major out of school for the first time going to go live where it’s cheap,” Addington said. “There’s something to the hipster as a curator that is actually kind of positive. They are conservatives that are literally conserving, which isn’t necessarily a bad thing.”

Their perspective is “you have to have what’s cool today, forget about tomorrow and definitely forget about the day before,” Mr. Addington added. “Hipsters call attention to the aesthetic... I think there’s a kind of value to that and one of the best ones of the hipster.”

[In a December 2013 New York Post article](#) about incoming hipsters fighting long-term residents of cities they are moving into, the story goes on to say that as resistant as old neighbors are to being pushed out... they may even like what the newcomers bring.

That’s because with hipsters comes high-end stores and amenities, and luxurious living arrangements.

In a study called “Bodegas or Bagel Shops? Neighborhood Differences in Retail and Household Services,” which looked at resident incomes in New York City and compared that with the amenities available in those neighborhoods in 2010, co-authors Rachel Meltzer and Jenny Schuetz found that higher-income neighborhoods, which would align with the trends of the creative class, had more available to them.

The report focuses on one gentrifying area, Harlem in New York City, which is considered low-income but upgrading. These types of neighborhoods, those that are upgrading, are receiving more food service and clothing stores per acre compared to those that are stable. But Harlem specifically, which has been one of the neighborhoods in New York to receive a lot of attention to its changing ways, has seen a significant impact.

“The purchase of high-end residential real estate implies the arrival in the neighborhood of affluent households, who might be expected to consumer relatively expensive shopping and entertainment options,” the study states. “Although much of the activity is targeted at low-to-moderate income consumers, the newer arrivals (Starbucks, H&M) are more upmarket than many long-standing establishments, as might be expected for a neighborhood in transition.”

And as far as employment and wages, economists suggest the creative class contributes to society through a trickle down system, where their careers create jobs and provides for a rise in wages.

THE IRONY

But there’s a coincidence in the subculture based on ironic tendencies — and that is, however beneficial hipsters are for a city, those benefits are most directly tied to the creative and upper class.

[In a CityLab.com article](#), written by Florida, he states his research found that the creative class collaborates in areas with each other and that the “trickle down” factor doesn’t work too well.

“Its benefits flow disproportionately to more highly-skilled knowledge, professional and creative workers whose higher wages and salaries are more than sufficient to cover more expensive housing in these

locations,” Florida wrote. “While less-skilled service and blue-collar workers also earn more money in knowledge-based metros, those gains disappear once their higher housing costs are taken into account.”

Hence the pushing out and gentrification in many areas.

It’s not only the cities ranked the highest — some of the most well-known cities in America and some of the lesser known neighborhoods — are seeing changes with the incoming of young, knowledgeable and creative talent in areas that were once lived in by the middle or lower class. New York City of course knows it well with neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Manhattan rapidly changing to fit the form of urban class.

“Compare it to the 1830s, 1840s. If it was cheap, hipsters could go there,” Addington said. “Like Williamsburg [in Brooklyn, N.Y.] in the 90s. And now moving on to Bushwick and further out.”

So then these areas aren’t just places to live. Instead they are seen as places to develop, not just for families but small empires.

“Neighborhoods, then, are not just homes, but opportunities for profit and redevelopment,” Zak Cheney-Rice wrote [in a Mic article](#). “And the renewal fantasy that defines them hides an often racist history of deliberate and concentrated impoverishment, one that’s inevitably copied wherever poor residents are forced to move next.”

Which cities may see the change the most may be within those that are attracting college graduates to move. [In a New York Times article about college graduates and where they’re moving](#), some cities that have made the top 100 of the index are reflected in the top 12 with the highest percent change in the number of college graduates aged 25 to 34 who are moving.

According to the article, a Harvard economist Edward Glaeser told the New York Times, “There is a very strong track record of places that attract talent becoming places of long-term success.”

HISTORY

Hipster is only one word but it brings out so many emotions and perspectives. Some hear it and snicker as they envision young rich kids in flowing and fringed clothes. Others grumble, thinking about the rent hikes that follow when these trendsetters move into a neighborhood. And of course there are the romanticists, to whom the hipsters are simply preserving an old relic of a culture, many times removed from its musical roots.

Because that’s how it all started. With some smooth jazz and an underground following.

In the 1940s, a hipster was a jazz musician. The name came from hip or hep, which meant cool, according to John Leland in his book “Hip: The History.” They were very much in the present, and searched for meaning in a world that didn’t care.

“A hipster is a person who doesn’t really associate with society very well and in fact he disdains much of what is going on in society,” Frank Tirro, a jazz musician who did not refer to himself as a hipster, said. “We were hip because we had this love. We were an inside group of musicians who had this particular love for a kind of music. But we were all still planning to succeed in life one way or another.”

“I think a hipster to the best of my understanding of the term is a person who doesn’t see much point,” Tirro added. “The real hipster is somebody who has so little respect for what’s going that he sort of takes himself out of it and that kind of person I never really associated with.”

And what was normally going on was usually something that they felt was no longer authentic, so they didn't associate with it anymore.

“Once something was taken by TIME [Magazine],” jazz musician Ben Sidran said, “it was over.”

Sidran, who has been in the music industry since 1967 and was in the band the Steve Miller Band, came out with an album in 2012 called [“Don't Cry For No Hipster”](#) that had a song with the same name. He said for hipsters, at least authentic ones, it was the search for “their own aesthetic. Having an inside know of what we now call counterculture.”

And although the hipster itself has changed in environment — not necessarily belonging solely to the music scene — Sidran said there is still some remnants of the original mentality within the hipsters of today.

“The search for authenticity is still big,” Sidran said. “Maybe some of it is just a look but maybe some of it is a search.”

Going Forward

Hipsters were expected to bring good with them when they came to these new communities because with them came the promise of renewal.

In some cases, as we can see, that is not the case as those who have been negatively impacted are not benefitted by the newcomers.

“Blitzkrieg cultural imperialism allows previously under-Instagrammed areas of our city to fulfill their potential as playgrounds for the rich without the headaches of investment or community engagement,” writer Jules Bentley said, that was later quoted in a [Jezebel](#) story. “Never mind having a Starbucks on every corner-when your favorite high-concept boutique eateries can chase you around on wheels, you can go absolutely anywhere and still get the same \$12 bacon and wheatgrass smoothie.”

And for others, the movements and subculture of the hipster is simply irritating.

“I think it's really frustrating for people in general. It's just a difficult time for people to feel a strong sense of identity and certainty when there are so many ways to express it,: Alexa Gould-Kavet, a fashion stylist [who did a paper on the subculture's identity and the theory of the hipster and its style](#), said. “A lot of my artist friends who are facebook are always complaining about who their look is being stolen from, this brand appropriated their look. Others are saying take the money, it's cool, and others saying no I don't want to be a sell out.”

There's certainly a mix of feelings when it comes to the hipsters, within the subculture and outside of it.

“I think in one sense they are good for neighborhoods — they create people on the street, a sociable, safe place and exchange of information,” Leland said. It can be bad, in a sense, because they create an environment that “doesn't know things outside themselves. They pressure in gentrification as well, but that could easily be happening without that.”

Areas across the nation have seen, started to see or will begin to see the impacts of having hipsters populate their cities. For some cities, it will be primarily due to college kids moving to attend a college far from home. For others, it may be a completely new phenomenon. But there's a completely new border being added to their homes, and it's all due in part to young adults moving to and renting in metropolitan areas to pursue creative jobs.

“Hipsters will find the next unlikely scene to conquer once they bore of the areas they are currently inhabiting,” Karlie Hustle, a new New Yorker, said. “I laughed when I saw an ad online saying East New York is the ‘new frontier.’ Still trying to figure out how it’s new, being that people have been living there for a very long time now.”