

Hip to Be Square

It's getting cooler to be conservative.

By Gavin McInnes

IF YOU ASK the average *American Conservative* subscriber about the kids today, he will probably put down his cigar and complain, "They're a bunch of knee-jerk liberals still brainwashed by the communist propaganda that worked so well on their parents. They're against invading Iraq because 'all war is bad.' They're against Israel because when it comes to light skin versus dark skin, the latter is always right, and they're pro-immigration for exactly the same reasons." I'd like to argue, but he's right.

I should know. I run a \$10 million corporation called VICE that has been deep inside the heads of 18-30s for the past 10 years. According to the *Cassandra Report* (a trend-spotting "cool hunter" that charges corporations tens of thousands of dollars to tell them what's hip), our magazine is the number one read for women aged 19-24 and for men aged 25-30. That's better than *Maxim*, *Jane*, or even the *New Yorker*. Since the *Cassandra Report* was made public, our magazine has branched out into retail (stores in Toronto, Los Angeles, and New York), film (four in production including director Spike Jonze's next picture), and TV (on Showtime). We are a successful company that has made its money recognizing cool, and the one thing that has been painfully clear to us over the years is that it is not cool to be conservative. In fact, the majority of our readership (white, straight, middle-class, American) is only totally positive about one thing: being white, straight, middle-class, and American is *wack*—or, at least, it was wack.

Call me a blind optimist, but I see a light at the end of the anti-American tunnel, a new trend of young people tired of being lied to for the sake of the "greater good." The *New York Times* dubbed them "Hipublicans." Demographics expert Michael Adams labels them "Social Hedonists," and when our magazine did a feature on them we called them "The New Conservatives." We did the piece because it became impossible to ignore a difference in the reactions to some of our more right-wing reporting. A new group was emerging, and the vitriolic "You dudes are all Nazis" letters were being replaced by ones saying "You dudes are finally telling the truth."

Five years ago, we did a two-page spread on how Project USA's Craig Nelson was brave enough to take on America's seriously damaged immigration policies. (We are immigrants ourselves and were therefore not the least bit afraid of being blackballed as "anti-immigrant.") The responses were hysterical. Formerly loyal readers called for boycotts. They annoyed our advertisers with silly rhetoric and called us racists. Needless to say, we were shocked. Like Toby Young in *How to Lose Friends and Alienate People* or Peter Brimelow in *Alien Nation*, we were new immigrants who couldn't understand why Americans were so determined to favor PC posturing over simple facts. Immigration is out of hand, and it's only going to get worse. Where were the young conservatives to come to our defense? Was the dumb community in control of the entire country?

Two years later, we ran an article on an artist who painted women with incredibly large rear ends. Gay men and straight women found the depictions revolting. Straight men loved it. In the article, the writer went so far as to blame the heavy concentration of gays in the magazine world for brainwashing women into thinking men don't want them to be at least a little bit porky. He talked about how men bought more hair products than women last year and how heavy grooming like hair dying, chest waxing, and even eyebrow plucking have become *de rigueur* for straight men. He claimed the gay community had "recreated straights in their own image." Predictably, our readers were outraged. But something was different this time. On our Web site's message boards, advocates of the Right started to appear. For every three people who called the article homophobic, there was at least one saying, "What about the part where it's true? Isn't that worth something?"—a comment that beautifully sums up the difference between liberals (equality first, truth last) and conservatives (truth first, everything else second).

It was as though Bruce-Banner conservatives had been prodded for so long they were starting to get very angry. And you don't want to see them when they're angry. The final straw was an article we ran a few months ago called "The Merits of War." It featured *The American Conservative's* executive editor Scott McConnell, *Coloring the News* author Bill McGowan, and an incredibly drunk skateboarder named Throatie. Scott was against, Bill was pro, and the irreverent skateboarder held our readers' MTV attention span for five pages of political discourse. The reaction was

amazing. Of course there were the typical anti-American brats calling Bill and Scott "stupid white men" and uneducated academics raving about the lack of liberals in the debate, but, more than ever, there were young people responding with favor to a predominantly right-wing discussion. They lashed out at our liberal readers, "What's with all the peace and love crap? You sound like a bunch of pathetic hippies."

This wasn't a group of already established conservative kids making a cameo on our Web site and our magazine's letters page just to bash liberals. These were a new group of kids sick of how "intellectually lazy" (to quote the Hipublicans) the Left had become. They weren't necessarily for invading Iraq. They just wanted to discuss the pros and cons in a rational and calm forum, without the liberal hyperbole of their peers. I felt like Dr. Frankenstein—"It's alive! IT'S ALIVE!"

And it wasn't just VICE's readership. Suddenly it had become fashionable to link liberalism with weakness and conservatism with honesty. Underground film iconoclast Vincent Gallo ("Buffalo 66," "Palookaville," "Goodfellas") is now quoting Nixon and Reagan as if they were Wordsworth and Yeats. Fashion photographer Terry Richardson (Gucci, Sisley, Levi's) is showing up at conservative book launches and publicly trashing Clinton. Even high-school students are getting in on the act, like the southern Californian artist collective called Sofia that made t-shirts and panties with the illegal-immigrant-crossing logo on them.

You wouldn't have seen anything like this five years ago, but now it seems that the reality of the boomers' liberalism is slowly starting to affect the livelihood of Generation X. The joy of mass immigration is easy to talk about when you live in the suburbs and benefit from cheap housecleaning, but when you are going to schools that are 50 percent Spanish

and watching your education slip through your fingers, you tend to be a little more pragmatic. The same goes for affirmative action. Who was laughing the loudest when Jayson Blair was exposed? The journalism students who were forced to intern for us because they couldn't get paying jobs in the mainstream press.

These kids, the New Conservatives, don't have the luxury of idealism that even the youth of the 1980s had. Due to the overwhelming glut of information on the Internet and an unprecedented barrage of marketing, these young people are more aware and more cynical than any generation that came before. Within this group, more and more are embrac-

ing conservatism. They are admittedly few—I would estimate that only 12 percent of our readers would dare call themselves conservatives—but that is at least twice what it was five years ago. Finally, the dumb community's days are numbered. They are slowly but surely being replaced with a new breed of kid that isn't afraid to embrace conservatism. I'm not saying I had anything to do with this newborn counterculture, but I do have this strange compulsion to start handing out cigars to all my friends. ■

Gavin McInnes the co-founder of VICE, a youth culture brand that was founded in Montreal and is now based in New York City.

Thrown to the Lions

Mideast Christians are more endangered than ever.

By Daniel McCarthy

"THROUGHOUT THE HOME are understated pieces of Christian iconography: a small portrait of Christ, a Virgin Mary figurine in the kitchen and a wallet-sized photo of an Eastern Orthodox priest attached to a mirror in the bedroom."

The words are Jonathan Finer's, writing on the front page of the *Washington Post*, and the description is of a residence in Baghdad that once belonged to the deposed Iraqi regime's most famous Christian, deputy prime minister Tariq Aziz. That Aziz, a member of Saddam Hussein's inner circle, was a Christian, and apparently a serious one, gives some suggestion of the place Christianity had in pre-liberation Iraq. But something else that Finer reports may give an even better picture: sitting on a desk in

one of Hussein's palaces, in what was evidently a child's room, was an Advent calendar. Far from being persecuted, Christianity in Hussein's Iraq was a visible presence even within the dictator's own household.

Iraq's Christians have been less than visible to the American public. Indeed, Christian minorities everywhere in the Middle East have received little attention from the public and the press, while U.S. policymakers have acted with indifference to fate of the region's Christians. Israel, confronted with suicide bombers and hostile nations near and far, has garnered considerable sympathy and support from Americans, and from evangelical Christians most of all. But the Middle East's own Christians, faced with