



# Rooted in Rebellion

## *Introduction*

**I**f we are what we wear, then we all have a little of the rebel inside us. Even what we think of as the conservative bedrock of casual menswear has a devil-may-care legacy.

Over the last century, musicians, actors, artists, authors, and activists have used clothes to cultivate a defiant posture in the public eye. Style icons like Marlon Brando, James Dean, Miles Davis, Mick Jagger, David Bowie, and Steve McQueen turned the fashion world on its head by endowing particular clothes with new symbolism and meaning, especially with a sense of “cool.” A wide range of subcultures emulated the new styles, and what was once considered radical, in time became mainstream.

The pieces that we cover in this book have a long history, often predating their modern interpretations by centuries. Indeed, icons of the stage and screen didn’t create style out of whole cloth so much as they borrowed and radically recontextualized it: they showcased new ways of wearing old clothes. By understanding the origins and evolution of certain items of clothing, we can better appreciate the development of subcultures and their influence on the mainstream. We can, for instance, understand why Elvis hated denim but wore it anyway; why it was transgressive for Brando to wear a T-shirt on screen; why the M-65

field jacket (designed for soldiers in the jungle) was adopted by those who opposed the war in Vietnam; and why denim, tees, and the bomber are now bedrock casual menswear pieces.

Nearly all of the clothing that we cover in this book was designed for a specific purpose outside the scope of fashion. Of course, how something looked was important (no clothing is ever designed without some concern for aesthetics), but not nearly as important as its ability to withstand the rigors of work or war, to keep the wearer dry and warm, or to prevent overheating on the playing field. Therefore, we’ve grouped the pieces into seven categories that reflect the purposes for which they were originally designed: workwear, military, maritime, aviation, sports, motors, and western.

Rebellious fashion icons borrowed liberally from each of these categories—often from more than one—to create styles that were widely adopted. As emerging subcultures assimilated new garments, they triggered style rebellions that spread around the world. The clothes that we cover in this book have played key roles in the history of fashion. Through a survey of that history, readers will learn the building blocks of casual and rebellious style, gaining insight into menswear that has, at one time or another, cut against the grain and changed style forever. ●

**Rebel royalty (1953):** Marlon Brando certainly wasn’t the first rebel to wear denim, T-Shirts, and engineer boots, but he brought the look of the outlaw to the silver screen and made it desirable. Rebel style seemed to crystallize around him, not just because of what he wore, but how well he wore it.