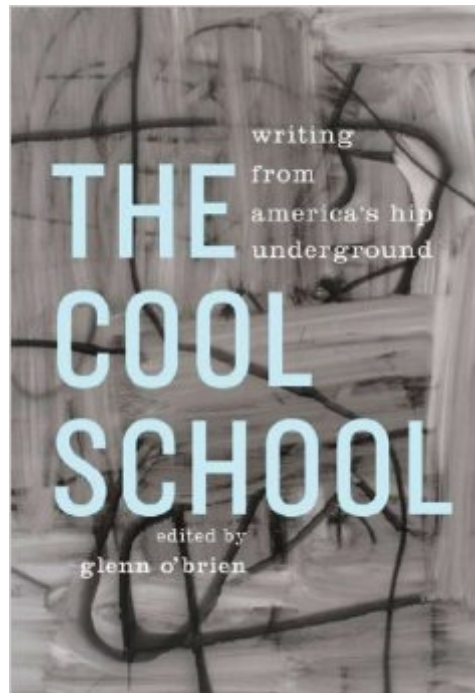


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# The Cool School: Writing From America's Hip Underground



## Synopsis

Who were the original hipsters? In this dazzling collection, Glenn O'Brien provides a kaleidoscopic guided tour through the margins and subterranean tribes of mid-twentieth century America—the worlds of jazz, of disaffected postwar youth, of those alienated by racial and sexual exclusion, of outlaws and drug users creating their own dissident networks. Whether labeled as Bop or Beat or Punk, these outsider voices ignored or suppressed by the mainstream would merge and recombine in unpredictable ways, and change American culture forever. To read *The Cool School* is to experience the energies of that vortex. Drawing on memoirs, poems, novels, comedy routines, letters, essays, and song lyrics, O'Brien creates an unparalleled literary mix tape bringing together Henry Miller, Miles Davis, Jack Kerouac, Diane di Prima, Lenny Bruce, William S. Burroughs, Bob Dylan, Annie Ross, Norman Mailer, Terry Southern, Andy Warhol, Lester Bangs, and dozens of others, including such legendary figures as Beat avatar Neal Cassady, jazz memoirist Babs Gonzales, inspired comic improviser Lord Buckley, no-holds-barred essayist Seymour Krim, and underground filmmaker Jack Smith. His one-of-a-kind anthology recreates an unforgettable era in all its hallucinatory splendor: transgressive, raucous, unruly, harrowing, and often subversively hilarious.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The Cool School Editor Glen O'Brien has collected fifty-seven individually penned pieces that could give any reader, depending on maturity, an appreciation of what it meant to belong to The Cool

School: Writing from America's Hip Underground; the beat generation; the hipsters. In this volume you will find letters, essays, lyrics of songs, poems, excerpts from novels and stories, comedy routines, memoirs, and a host of meaningful quotes. Before each selection, O'Brien provides a masterfully written introduction for the writer whose relatively short work follows. At times he gives an intro a slight biographical slant, yet always explaining why that person's work was chosen for The Cool School. Then too, as in his introduction to Ismael Reed (p320), he targets precisely the accomplishments of Reed as an African American poet, essayist, and novelist. The excerpt taken from Reed's Mumbo Jumbo is amusing dialogue to explain the grip that sensual music and dance had on the times. So who were the The Cool School people? What critical attribute set these individuals apart from the rest of the world?

When THE COOL SCHOOL was pitched to me, I feel in love with the concept. A collection of writing by the original hipsters, about what it meant to be cool. And not just the Beat poets, but jazz men and comedians and more, including people outside the movement who criticized it. The pieces range from prose fiction to poetry to nonfiction, from excerpts to complete works. I think Glenn O'Brien did a decent job of assembling a plurality of voices. Names reoccur between pieces, giving a real sense of how the scene fit together and how people from different groups knew and thought of each other. Figures like Bird, Charlie Parker, loom large as their trailblazing influence is taken in and reflected. There are several black writers, and author there is no editorializing aside from short introductions to each piece, it is easy to see some of the tension around white men copying black slang, music, and attitudes. There are several women included in the anthology, although not Carolyn Cassady, possible the best known female Beat generation writer. The blurb mentions the "sexually excluded," but they were less in the anthology than I expected. Allen Ginsberg is the most notable exception there. (I triple checked the table of contents just to be sure I hadn't missed a piece from him.) The writing is arranged by chronology, I believe, which works fairly well. It allows for a clear progression of ideas. Sometimes I wished for another arrangement, as Del Close's piece on vocabulary would've been great at the beginning. I could read large chunks of THE COOL SCHOOL at once, but did prefer to take breaks. While there are a great many voices on display, the anthology's raison d'être is pieces that explore the scene.

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