The Alt-100 List recognizes those icons over whom we argued the longest and hardest. They are grouped in alphabetical order according to their period of greatest acclaim.

These public figures point up the richness and depth of American popular culture, and we hope it provides further fuel for future conversations. Here you will find some artists whose cool cachet lasted only a decade and some who were only cult figures. If we could not find a photograph that captured a person’s cool, he or she can be found here. After all, you have to look cool sometime to carry off the daily struggle of existence with style.

“American Cool” is not the last word on cool but rather the first step toward a new national conversation on this singular American self-concept. Who’s on your cool list? Here are two questions to consider:

1. Did this person bring something entirely new into American culture?
2. Will this person’s work or art stand the test of time and history?

1900–1940

Clara Bow
Bing Crosby
Marcel Duchamp
Clark Gable
Alberta Hunter
Jack London
Lee Miller
Ginger Rogers
Artie Shaw
Gertrude Stein

1940–60
Chet Baker
Tony Bennett
Lord Buckley
Hoagy Carmichael
Neal Cassady
Patsy Cline
Sam Cooke
Katherine Dunham
Billy Eckstine
Ralph Ellison
Dexter Gordon
Gloria Grahame
Dashiell Hammett
Sam “Lightnin’” Hopkins
Lena Horne
Howlin’ Wolf (Chester Burnett)
Louis Jordan
Gene Kelly
Eartha Kitt
Veronica Lake
Roy Orbison
Bettie Page
Sugar Ray Robinson
Sonny Rollins
Dinah Washington
Ted Williams

1960–80
Duane Allman
Warren Beatty
George Carlin
John Cassavetes
César Chávez
Julius “Dr. J.” Erving
Bob Gibson
Jerry Garcia
Dick Gregory
Pam Grier
Halston (Roy Halston Frowick)
Lorraine Hansberry
Isaac Hayes
Abbie Hoffman
Dennis Hopper
Quincy Jones
Janis Joplin
Ken Kesey
Stan Lee
Roy Lichtenstein
Norman Mailer
Dean Martin
Curtis Mayfield
Jim Morrison
Joe Namath
Al Pacino
Arnold Palmer
Richard Pryor
Joey Ramone
Smokey Robinson
Ed Ruscha
Nina Simone
Ronnie Spector
Lily Tomlin
Billy Dee Williams

1980–Present
Laurie Anderson
Maya Angelou
Biggie Smalls (Christopher Wallace)
Jeff Bridges
Chuck Brown
George Clinton
George Clooney
Ani DiFranco
Dr. Dre (Andre Young)
Tina Fey
Kim Gordon
Dave Grohl
Keith Haring
Samuel L. Jackson
Jim Jarmusuch
Derek Jeter
Joan Jett
Angelina Jolie
Tom Petty
Queen Latifah (Dana Owens)
Questlove (Ahmir Thompson)
Kelly Slater
Gwen Stefani
Michael Stipe
Uma Thurman
John Waters
Jack White
Serena Williams
Cassandra Wilson