

ANDRÉ LEON TALLEY

b. October 16, 1948

d. January 18, 2022

FASHION JOURNALIST

*“I scorched the earth with my talent,
and I let my light shine.”*

**He was the first
Black person to serve
as creative director
of U.S. Vogue.**

André Leon Talley was an extravagant, trailblazing fashion journalist and pop-culture icon. He rose through the ranks of an elitist, historically white industry to become the creative director and editor at large at Vogue magazine. He was the first Black person ever to do so.

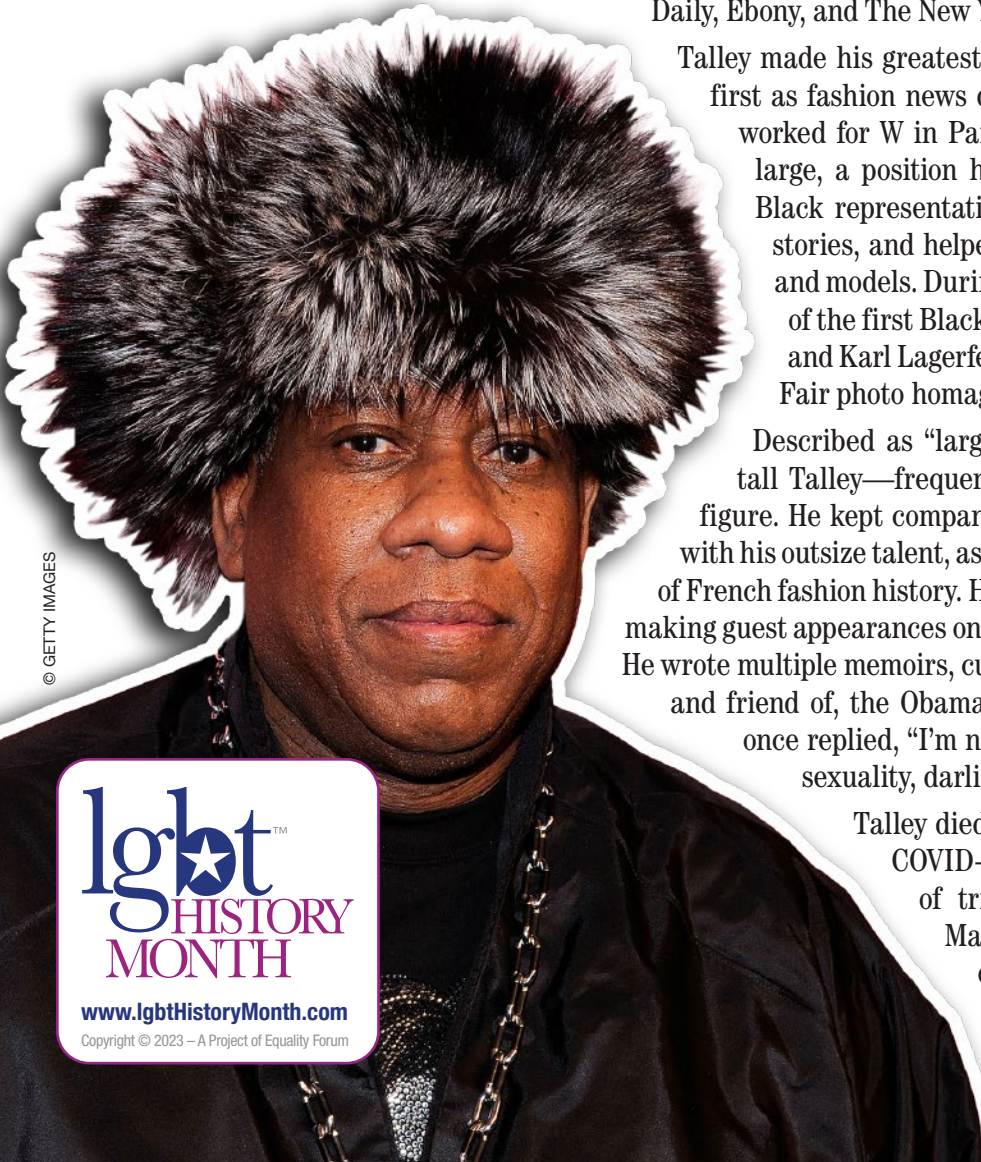
Talley's path to fashion-industry legend was far from typical. Growing up in the segregated South, he was raised by his grandmother, who worked as a cleaning lady. He credited her with his earliest understanding of style—watching her, with her gloves and blue-rinsed hair, meticulously ready herself for church. When Talley was 9, he discovered Vogue at the library. As a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, he found his passion and escape on its glossy pages.

After earning a master's degree in French literature on a scholarship from Brown University, Talley began his career as an unpaid intern for fashion journalist Diana Vreeland. She found him a position at Andy Warhol's Factory and at Interview magazine. He subsequently wrote for publications like Women's Wear Daily, Ebony, and The New York Times.

Talley made his greatest mark at Vogue, where he started in 1983, first as fashion news director and later as creative director. He worked for W in Paris before returning to Vogue as editor at large, a position he held until 2013. He pushed for greater Black representation on the runway, on title pages, and in stories, and helped advance the careers of Black designers and models. During his tenure, Naomi Campbell became one of the first Black models to appear on a Vogue cover, and he and Karl Lagerfeld famously featured her in a quirky Vanity Fair photo homage to the classic film “Gone with the Wind.”

Described as “larger than life,” the exuberant 6-foot-6-inch-tall Talley—frequently seen sporting a cape—cut a striking figure. He kept company with top designers, whom he impressed with his outsize talent, astute observations, and scholarly knowledge of French fashion history. He came to embody the idea of fashion itself, making guest appearances on shows such as “Sex and City” and “Empire.” He wrote multiple memoirs, curated exhibitions, and became a stylist for, and friend of, the Obamas. Asked about his sexual orientation, he once replied, “I’m not heterosexual. I’m saying I’m fluid in my sexuality, darling.”

Talley died from complications of a heart attack and COVID-19. His death was met with an outpouring of tributes from Anna Wintour, Tyra Banks, Marc Jacobs, Michelle Obama, and countless other famous friends and admirers.



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